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10

BLUEBELL.

BLUEBELL.

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BLUEBELL.

A Novel.

BY
MRS. G. C. HUDDLESTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

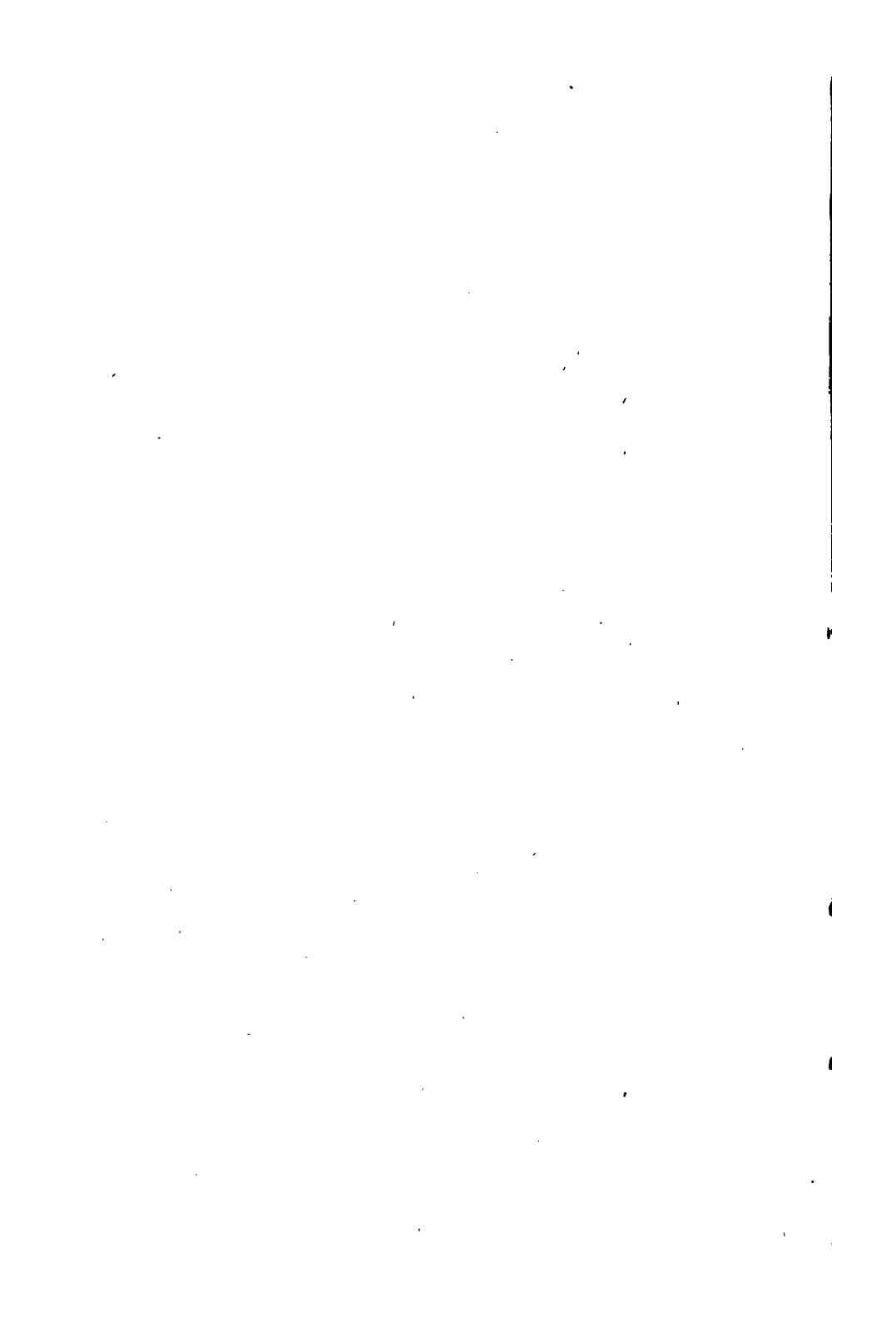
Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole ;
Shall see ourselves, and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.



London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY,
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1875.

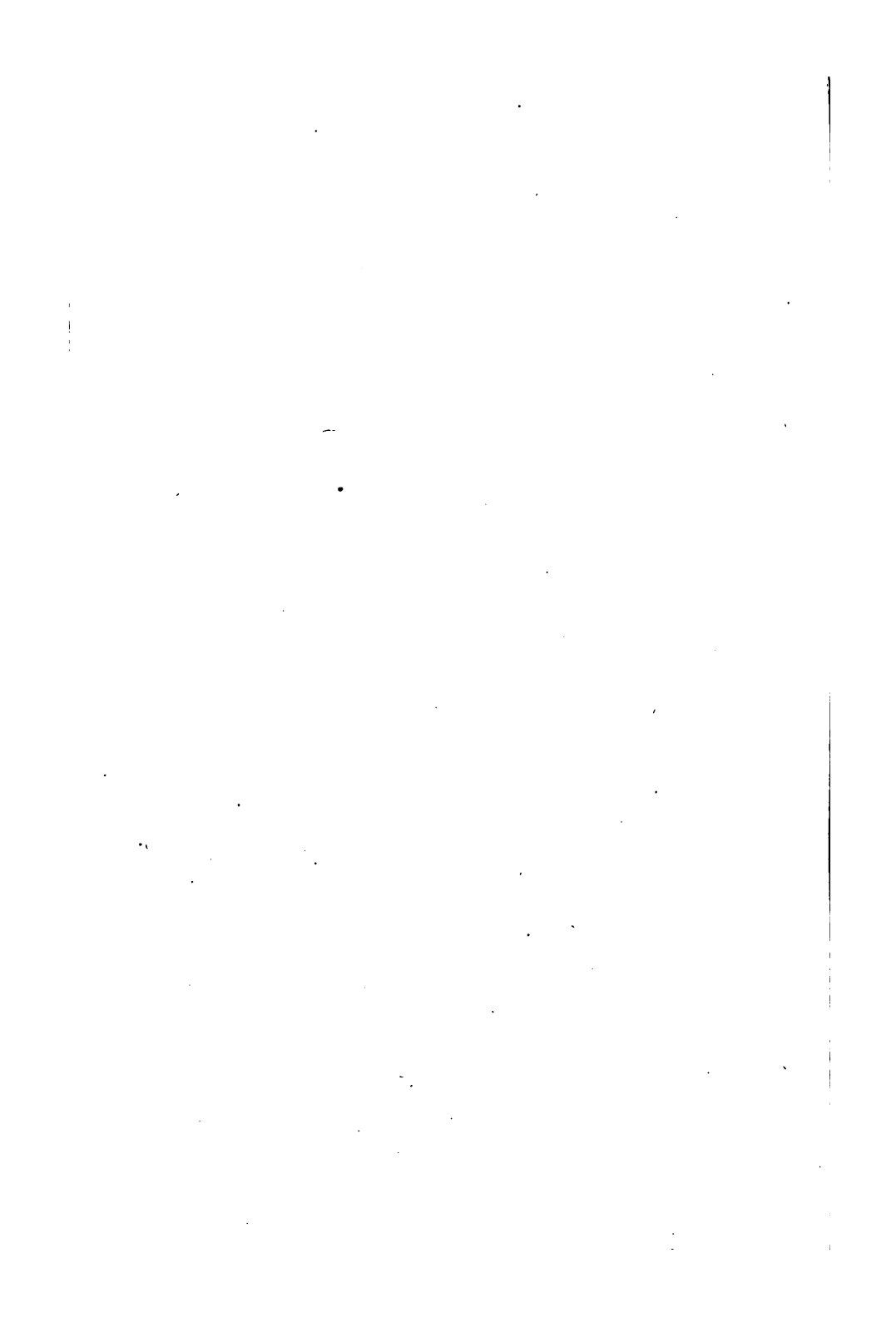
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BLUEBELL.

CHAPTER I.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.

I see her now—the vision fair,
Of candour, innocence, and truth,
Stand tiptoe on the verge of air,
’Twixt childhood and unstable youth.

It was the “fall” in Canada, and the leaves were dying royally in purple, crimson, and gold. On the edge of a common, skirting a well-known city of Ontario, stood a small, rough-cast cottage, behind which the sun was setting with a red promise of frost, his flaming tints

repeated in the fervid hue of the Virginian creeper that clothed it.

This modest tenement was the retreat of three unprotected females, two of whom were seated in silent occupation close to a black stove, which imparted heat, but denied cheerfulness. The elder was grey and tintless as her life,—harsh wisdom wrung from sad experience ever on lips thin and tight, as though from habitually repressing every desire. The younger, a widow, was scarcely passed middle age, small of stature, but wizened beyond her years by privation and sorrow.

A smell of coal-oil, that most unbearable of odours, pervaded the interior of the cottage, revealing that the general servant below in lighting the lamp had, as usual, upset some, and was retaining

the aroma by smearing it off with her apron.

Presently a quick, light step tripped over the wooden side-walk, a shadow darkened the window, and a vision of youth and freshness burst into the dingy little parlour.

A rather tall, full-formed young Hebe was Theodora Leigh, of that pure pink-and-white complexion that goes farther to make a beauty than even regularity of feature; her long, sleepy eyes were just the shade of the wild hyacinth; indeed, her English father always called her "Bluebell," after a flower that does not grow on Transatlantic soil.

But they were Irish eyes, "put in with a dirty finger," and varying with every mood. Gooseberry eyes may disguise more soul, but they get no credit

for it. Humour seemed to dance in that soft, blue fire; poetry dreamed in their clear depths; love—but that we have not come to yet; they were more eloquent than her tongue, for she was neither witty nor wise, only rich in the exuberant life of seventeen, and as expectant of goodwill and innocent of knowledge of the world as a retriever puppy.

Apparently, Miss Bluebell was not in the suavest of humours, for she flung her hat on to one crazy chair, and herself on another, with a vehemence that caused a sensible concussion.

“My dear, how brusque you are,” said Mrs. Leigh, plaintively.

“So provoking,” muttered Bluebell.

“What’s gone wrong with the child

now?" said Miss Opie, the elder proprietress of the domicile.

"Why," said Bluebell, "I met the Rollestons, and they asked me to their picnic in the Humber on Friday; but how *can* I go? Look here!" and she pointed to a pair of boots evidently requiring patching. "Oh, mother! could you manage another pair now? Miss Scrag has sent home my new 'waist,' and I can do up my hat, but these buckets are only fit for the dust-hole."

Mrs. Leigh sighed,—“A new pair, with side-springs, would cost three dollars. No, Bluebell, I can't, indeed.”

“I might as well be a nun, then, at once,” said the girl, with tears in her voice; and a sympathetic dew rose in Mrs. Leigh's weary eyes at the dis-

appointment she could not avert from her spoiled darling.

"Bluebell," said Miss Opie, "if you read more and scampered about less, your mind would be better fortified to bear these little reverses."

"Shut up!" muttered Bluebell, in the artless vernacular of a school-girl, half turning her shoulder with an impatient gesture.

The entrance of the tea-things created a diversion, but the discontented girl sat apart, while the hideousness of her surroundings came upon her as a new revelation. Certainly, in Canada, in a poverty-stricken abode, taste seems more completely starved than in any other country.

Bluebell, in her critical mood, noted the ugly delf tea-things, so badly ar-

ranged; the black stove, four feet into the room, with its pipe running through a hole in the wall; the rickety horse-hair chairs and wire blind, for the window "gave" on the street, where gasping geese were diving in the gutters for the nearest approach to water they could find.

Scarcely less repugnant were the many-coloured crochet-mats and anti-macassars with which Miss Opie loved to decorate the apartment; nor was a paper frill adorning a paltry green flower-vase wanting to complete the tasteless *tout ensemble*.

The evening wore on; Mrs. Leigh proceeded with the turning of an old merino dress; Miss Opie adjusted her spectacles, and read *Good Words*; Bluebell sat down to the piano and executed

a selection from Rossini's ' Messe Solennelle ' with force and fervour.

"You play very well, child," said Miss Opie.

"That is fortunate," said Bluebell, "for I mean to be a governess."

"You mean you want a governess," retorted the other. "Why, what in the world do you know?"

"More than most children of ten years old. I might get a hundred dollars a year. Mamma, I could buy myself new boots then."

"You are nothing but a self-willed child yourself, unable to bear the slightest disappointment," said Miss Opie.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Leigh, coaxingly; "I'll see if I cannot get you the boots. They will give me credit at the store."

"No, no; I know you can't afford it; they were new last April. Mamma is oil to your vinegar, Aunt Jane."

"And you the green young mustard in the domestic salad—hot enough, and, like all ill-weeds, growing apace."

"Then it is field mustard, and not used for salad," said Bluebell, anxious for the last word. And, escaping from the room, went to place some bones in the shed, for a casual in the shape of a starving cur, who called occasionally for food and a night's lodging.

About twenty years ago, when this melancholy Mrs. Leigh was a lovely young Canadian of rather humble origin, Theodore Leigh, a graceless subaltern in the Artillery, had just returned from leave, and, going one day to the Rink, was "regularly flumoxsed," as he ex-

pressed it, by the vision of Miss Lesbia Jones skimming over the ice like a swallow on the wing. And when she proceeded to cut a figure - of - 8 backwards, and execute another intricate movement called "the rose," his admiration became vehement, and, seizing on a brother-officer he had observed speaking to her, demanded an introduction.

"To the 'Tee-to-tum'? Oh, certainly."

Miss Lesbia was very small, and wore the shortest of petticoats, which probably suggested the appellation.

Fatigued with her evolutions, she had sunk with a pretty little air of *abandon* on the platform, and her destiny, in a beaver coat and cap, was presented by Mr. Wingfield.

After this, a common object at the Rink was a tall young man, in all the

agonies of a *début* on skates, and a bewitching little attendant sprite shooting before and around him, occasionally righting him with a fairy touch when he evinced too wild a desire to dash his brains against the wall.

At all the sleighing parties, also, Miss Lesbia's form was invariably observable in Mr. Leigh's cutter, with a violet and white "cloud" matching the robe borders and ribbons on the bells; and he and the "Tee-to-tum" spun round together in half the vales of every ball during the winter.

Perhaps, after all, the attachment might have lived and died without exceeding the "muffin" phase, had not the "beauty" Captain of the battery cut in, and made rather strong running too, partly because he considered her "fetching," and partly,

he said, "from regard to Leigh, who was making an ass of himself."

Jealousy turned philandering into earnest. Theodore went straight to the maiden aunt, with whom Miss Jones resided, and, after most vehement badgering, got her consent to a private marriage within three days. The poor spinster, though much flustered, knowing his attentions to Lesbia had been a good deal talked about, felt almost relieved to have it settled respectably, though so abruptly.

On the appointed day, having obtained a week's leave, Theodore, with his best man, the last joined subaltern, dashed up to the church-door in a cutter, just in time to receive Lesbia and her bewildered chaperone.

After the ceremony, they started off

for their week's honeymoon to the Falls; and the best man, absolved from secrecy, spread the news through the regiment.

Theodore had scribbled off the intelligence in reckless desperation to his father, of whom he was the only child, and Sir Timothy Leigh, a proud and ambitious man, never forgave the irrevocable piece of folly so cavalierly announced to him.

Theodore received a letter from the family lawyer, couched in the terms of sorrowful reprehension such functionaries usually assume on similar occasions.

"It was Mr. Vellum's painful duty to inform him that Sir Timothy would decline to receive him on his return to England; that two hundred a year would be placed annually to his credit at Cox's; but the estates not being

entailed, that was the utmost farthing he need ever expect from him."

Such was the gist of the communication, and Theodore, hardened by his father's severity, and unable to bear the privations of a narrow income, absented himself more and more from their wretched lodgings, and tried to drown his cares by drinking himself into a state of semi-idiocy.

There is little more to relate of this ill-starred marriage, of which Bluebell was the fruit; for soon after her birth young Leigh was killed by being upset out of a dog-cart.

Driving home with unsteady hands from mess one night, he collided with a street car, which inevitably turned over the two-wheeled vehicle. Theodore was pitched out, his head striking

on the iron rails, and never breathed again.

Whatever grief Sir Timothy may have felt at his son being snatched from him, unreconciled and unforgiven, did not show itself in mercy to the widow.

Mr. Vellum was again in requisition, and proposed, on behalf of Sir Timothy, to make Mrs. Leigh a suitable allowance on condition that she remained in Canada, and delivered over the child to her grandfather, to be brought up and educated as his heiress. In case these terms were refused, she would continue to receive annually two hundred a-year; but no further assistance would be granted.

Lesbia, in her loneliness and bereavement, was heart-broken at this unfeeling proposition, and Bluebell being too young for a choice, she consulted the voice of

Nature alone, and refused to part with her child.

The maiden aunt, Miss Opie, willingly received them. She had a mere pittance, and lived in a boarding-house; but, by joining their slender purses, they took the cottage in which we find them.

Thus in extreme poverty was Bluebell reared until her seventeenth year, though by personal privations Mrs. Leigh sent her to *the school par excellence*, attended by most of the girls in the city, whether their parents were "in" or "out" of society. Bluebell, having the *prestige* of an English father, own son of a baronet, and military into the bargain, was considered in the former class, and included at an early age in the gaieties of the winter.

A new friend, who had been particularly

kind to her, was Mrs. Rolleston, wife of the Colonel of a regiment quartered there, and to her Bluebell repaired to make sorrowful excuses for the projected picnic, and also to confide the scheme that possessed her mind of earning money as a musical teacher or nursery governess.

Mrs. Rolleston felt half inclined to laugh at the unformed impulsive child, who was such a pet in their household, but seemed far too babyish and unmethodical to be recommended for any situation; yet remembering her mother's straitened circumstances, and that the girl probably wanted some pocket-money, she listened sympathetically, and promised to turn it over in her mind.

Music she knew Bluebell thoroughly understood and excelled in. She had for years received instruction gratis from

the organist at the Cathedral, who, originally attracted by her lovely voice singing in the choir, took her up with enthusiasm, and taught her harmony and thorough bass. Thus, instead of only practising a desultory accomplishment, she was able to compose and arrange her tuneful ideas correctly.

A dark, striking-looking girl interrupted them. This was Cecil Rolleston, the eldest daughter of the house, or rather she stood in that relation to the Colonel, being the offspring of his first wife.

"Come out and play croquet, Bluebell," said she; "the children are having a game; they only let me go on condition of bringing you,"—and she led the way through the window into a charming garden, with large shady maple-trees just

beginning to drop their deep-dyed, variegated leaves on the turf; the blue-birds were already gone, but the red and ashen-hued robin, nearly the size of a jay, still rustled through the boughs.

A little white dog, with a ribbon on, was holding a ball between its feathery toes, and playing with it as a cat does a mouse; a gardener was refreshing the thirsty flowers, which had outgrown their strength; and Fleda, Estelle, and Lola, twelve, eleven, and nine, were playing croquet with the zest of recent emancipation from lessons.

The governess, a dark, sallow expositor of the arts and sciences, also wielded a mallet, and Cecil and Bluebell completed the six.

The sides were pretty equally cast, and the combatants were in a most interesting

crisis of the game, when Colonel Rolleston entered the garden.

He was a very handsome man, and, as is often the case with the only male in a family of women, so studied and given in to by all his female *entourage*, that he would not have been pleased, whatever their occupations, if he were not immediately rallied round by a little court of flatterers.

"Estelle," said the governess, "offer your papa your mallet, and ask him to be so kind as to play with us." The child's face lengthened; she had not much hope of his refusing it, but advanced with her request.

"Must I?" said the Colonel.

"Oh, yes!" cried the chorus of voices; "be my partner—be mine."

"Don't tear me to pieces among

you," said he, with a deprecating gesture.

"Take Bluebell on your side, papa," cried Cecil; "she is very good, and we'll keep Miss Prosody, who is equally so."

And thus they proceeded, the Colonel radiant with every successful stroke, and blaming mallet, ball, and ground when otherwise, reiterating, "I can't make a stroke to-day."

Bluebell was very fond of the Colonel, who liked pretty faces about him, and had been kind to her; but she could not resist a slight feeling of repulsion at what she considered an abject manœuvre of Miss Prosody's. His ball, by an unskilful miss, was left in her power; her duty to her side required her to crack it to the other end of the ground, but a glance at the irritable gloom of his countenance induced

her to discover it to be more to her advantage to attack one rather beyond, and, judiciously missing it, left her own blue one an easy stroke for him.

The shadows dispersed, and, all playfulness, the Colonel apostrophized his prize, which he succeeded in hitting. "Here is my little friend in blue; shall I hurt it? no, I will not harm it." By-play of relief and gratitude on the governess's part, as he requited her amiability by merely taking two off, leaving his interesting friend in blue unmoved.

This naturally did not enhance the interest of the children, who felt it was not the game of croquet that was being played. Cecil, replying with a laughing glance to the indignant eye-telegraphy of Fleda, began to play at random; and Bluebell and Lola, not finding much antagonism from

the other side, soon pulled the Colonel through his hoops and won the game. After which, Bluebell retraced her steps across the common, accompanied part of the way by Miss Rolleston, to whom she also confided her governess's projects.

Cecil was very fond of her; she had few companions, and her sisters were mere children. All the time the younger girl was talking, she was silently revolving a plan. It so happened that Cecil was in rather independent circumstances for a young lady, a maternal relative having left her a legacy at twelve years old, which, by the time she was twenty-one, would bring in a thousand a year.

In the mean time, she drew half that sum annually, and, of course, contributed to the domestic expenses. How much pleasanter it would be for Bluebell to

live with them than with strangers. She might be *her* musical teacher; singing duets even brought out her own voice surprisingly; it would be delightful to practise together; the children had no taste for music, neither did Mrs. Rolleston care for it. Besides, she felt a generous pleasure in the prospect of assisting her friend, poor Bluebell, who often had to deny herself a mere bit of ribbon from want of a shilling to pay for it. It might require a little management at home, so she would not hint at it yet, and, with a warm caress and a gay farewell nod, they separated.

Next morning, Mrs. Leigh, still engaged in the resuscitation of the merino dress, was surprised by a visit from Mrs. Rolleston. That lady, for a wonder, considering her errand, had come alone, for it was seldom that any little domestic

arrangement was entered on without the personal supervision of the Colonel.

However, there was a counter attraction at barracks this morning, and having, so to speak, held a board on Cecil's proposition, and opposed, argued, and thoroughly talked it over, Mrs. Rolleston was empowered to suggest to Mrs. Leigh a plan for taking Bluebell into their family as musical companion to Cecil and nursery governess to Freddy, the heir apparent, ætat four. The poor little lady did not seem much elated at the proposal. "I know my child will wish it," she said. "I can give her no variety, no indulgences, and she is of an age when occupation and society are a necessity to her. I sometimes feel," she murmured, with a sigh, "that I have stood in her light by not agreeing to her grandfather's conditions."

A look of curiosity from Mrs. Rolleston elicited an explanation, and she heard for the first time the whole history of Bluebell's antecedents.

"Why," cried she, much excited, "I remember that Sir Timothy before I married; there are so many Leighs, it never struck me he might be your father-in-law. I recollect hearing he had disinherited his son, but he has adopted a grand-nephew, which, I am afraid, looks bad for Bluebell." And she listened with renewed interest to Mrs. Leigh's diffuse reminiscences, while her *protégée* appeared to her in a new and romantic light, and she pictured half-a-dozen possibilities for her future.

From a miniature of the graceless Theodore which Mrs. Leigh produced, there could be no doubt of the resem-

blance to his daughter in air and feature; the long sleepy eyes were identical, though the slightly insolent expression of Theodore's was, happily, wanting.

"He was the best of husbands," whimpered the widow, on whose placid mind the shortcomings of the dissipated youth seemed to have left no impression; "but he was hardly treated in this world, and so he was taken to a better."

Before Mrs. Rolleston left, it was arranged that Bluebell was to make her first essay in governessing on Freddy Rolleston, her Sundays to be spent as often as possible with her mother; and ere another week had passed, she and her effects were transferred to the Maples.

A bed was made up for her in a little room off Cecil's, and the tuition of Freddy carried on in the nursery; for Mrs. Rol-

leston having some doubts as to how the amateur and professional governess might amalgamate, avoided letting her entrench on Miss Prosody's premises.

That lady, indeed, was disposed to look upon her with suspicion and incipient dislike. She had always been treated with great consideration — quite one of the family, and cared not for “a rival near her throne.” Who was Bluebell that she should be made so much of? — a little nursery governess with no attainments, and yet Cecil's inseparable companion! She was a prime favourite with the Colonel, whose “ways” she had made a judicious study of, and treated with considerable tact. He always mentioned her as “that dear invaluable creature, Miss Prosody.” She could occasionally put an idea into his mind which he mistook for

his own: as, for instance, when he observed to his wife,—“What a pity that girl has such a preposterous name, and that you all have the habit of calling her by it. The other evening that idiot young Halkett must needs say, ‘What a lovely pet name!’ I can tell you I took him up pretty short. You really must not have her down so much, if these boys think they may talk nonsense to her.”

Mrs. Rolleston was rather surprised at the irritation with which this was said; to be sure she had not heard Miss Prosody previous to young Halkett’s foolish remark, lamenting that Bluebell “did not show more reserve with gentlemen guests, and that she put herself so much on an equality with Cecil.” The Colonel was a domestic man, and liked cheerfulness at his fireside, of which he himself was to

be the centre and inspiration; anything approaching bad spirits, silence, or headaches he always resented.

Bluebell was well enough as contributing to the liveliness of the little society—a pretty smiling young girl is seldom *de trop*; but then she must be satisfied without lovers, whose presence the Colonel considered subversive of all rational comfort.

Good-natured Mrs. Rolleston pursued the even tenor of her way, the Colonel's fidgets had a soporific effect on her nerves and created no corresponding alarms; her idol, Freddy, was satisfied with the new administration, and ceased to wage internecine warfare with his nurse; and certainly the unwonted tranquillity consequent was a decided boon to the rest of the household.



CHAPTER II.

BERTIE.

In the greenest growth of the Maytime
We rode where the roads were wet ;
Between the dawn and the daytime
The spring was glad that we met.

SWINBURNE.

Two or three months passed, the blue-birds and robins had all disappeared, and the snow-birds, hardy scions of the feathered tribe capable of withstanding the rigours of a Canadian winter, were alone to be seen. The Rinks had been flooded, and skating was going on with vigour; the snow was not quite in a satisfactory state as yet; but a few sleighs jingled merrily about, with their bright

bits of colour, the edging of fur robes and ribbon on the sleigh bells. A general impulse of joyful anticipation ran through all the young people as winter unlocked her stores of amusement, and the keen sabre-like air, so bracing and exhilarating, stirred the life in young veins, and set their spirits dancing with exuberant vitality.

The Rollestons, who had only come out in the spring, were attracted with everything. Not a sleigh passed but there was a rush from the children to the window, and Colonel Rolleston, who was building one, received fresh suggestions about it most days from his excited family.

Every morning Cecil, under Bluebell's tuition, practised skating at the Rink, and had devised an original and becoming costume, to be assumed as soon as she had

attained sufficient command of her limbs not to object to a share of public attention. In the afternoon the Rink was generally crowded, and many of the Colonel's regiment evinced an eagerness to help Cecil along, and pretend to receive instruction from the skilful and blooming Bluebell; so poor Mrs. Rolleston was then invariably detailed by the Colonel for chaperone duty, and sat shivering on the platform while Cecil was being initiated in the mysteries of "dutch rolls" and "outside edge." On one of these occasions she was roused by a well-known voice calling her by name, and turned round in joyful surprise to greet a young man just come in.

"My dear Bertie, where have you sprung from? Have you been to our house?"

"Just left it and my traps. Lascelles suddenly gave up his leave, which I applied for, and have got a week certain, and most likely all of it, for there are plenty of Captains down there; so I thought I would look you up to begin with."

"To begin with! You must stay here all the time—make it head-quarters, at any rate. You have been travelling all the summer, and there's nothing to do now."

"Moose," murmured Bertie. "Ah! there's Cecil."

Cecil, skating hand-in-hand to the tune of "Paddle your own canoe," was not sufficiently disengaged to remark her mother's companion. His eyes followed her with a keen, comprehensive glance, which Mrs. Rolleston observed complacently.

"Don't you think her improved?—much prettier?" asked she.

"Skating always suits a well-made girl. That black and scarlet get-up, too, is very becoming, but pretty—hardly."

"She is, however, very much admired," said Mrs. Rolleston, warmly, for a step-mother.

"Ah!" cried Bertie, with a slight accent of bitterness, "reasons enough for that. How well some of these girls skate! Who is that shooting-star?"

The planet in question gyrated towards them, dropped on one knee on the platform for the relief of strained ankles, and, as she addressed Mrs. Rolleston, caught a look of decided admiration on Bertie's face.

A Canadian girl is nothing if not self-possessed; she sustained the gaze with the most perfect calmness.

"Bluebell, this is my brother, Captain Du Meresq. Cecil ought to rest; will you go and tell her to come here?"

"Who is that young beauty whom you addressed in the language of flowers?" asked he.

"Nonsense, Bertie! she is Freddy's governess. You must not begin to talk absurdity to her; you will annoy Edward."

"He don't object to fair faces on his own account."

"Well, this particular one is more bother than pleasure to him. You know his horror of 'danglers'; he is afraid of aimless flirtations with Bluebell, who, being also Cecil's companion, is constantly in the drawing-room."

"Ah, my beloved niece," said Captain Du Meresq, as he gave Cecil consider-

able support from the ice to the platform.

“What has given us this unexpected treat?” said she, with a warmer hue than usual in her clear, pale check.

“My anxiety to see your new companion.”

“Whose existence, I suppose, you have just heard of.”

“It has been my loss,” retorted he. “Fascinating young creature! The name Bluebell just describes those wild hyacinth eyes.”

“Oh! Bertie,” said his sister and Cecil together, “how absurd you are about girls.”

“And then,” persisted he, “that charming tawny hair and milk-white skin.”

“One might think you were describing an Alderney cow. It’s a pity she is not called ‘Daisy’ or ‘Cowslip.’”

"Girls are all alike," said Captain Du Meresq, sententiously. "Even you, my beloved Cecil, who are a woman of mind, can't stand my wild admiration of—Cowslip."

Cecil raised her eyebrows, and a scornful beam shot from the dark eyes that were her chief attraction.

"Nor could the 'dairy flower' herself, I should think. It's no use rhapsodizing before me, Bertie; I shall not tell her in any confidential communication, whatever you may think."

"Ah, well," said Captain Du Meresq, with a sigh, "let us hope the ingenious child may understand the universal language of the eyes, for I hear papa would not approve of my speaking to her."

Mrs. Rolleston was becoming fidgetty. To some women, as they advance in years, an inability of separating chaff

from earnest becomes more pronounced, and the uppermost wish of her mind at present was to see a real attachment between Bertie and Cecil. Albert Du Meresq was only her half-brother; but he had become her charge in infancy under terrible circumstances, which we will briefly relate.

When Mr. Du Meresq married his mother, a wilful Irish beauty, Mrs. Rolleston was a shy, reserved girl of thirteen, and became very jealous of her father's exclusive devotion to his bride and neglect of herself.

Lady Inez looked upon her as rather a nuisance, and was coldly critical upon her appearance and manner. She was an unsparing mimic, and frequently exercised the faculty on her step-daughter, whose nervousness became awkwardness

in the constant expectation of being turned into ridicule. Consequently, she cordially disliked not only Lady Inez, but the little step-brother, who was made of so much importance, till one ghastly day changed the aspect of events.

Like a fearful dream it had seemed—a strange carriage rolling to the door, from which emerged her father and another gentleman carrying a terrible burden, looking supernaturally long in a riding-habit. White scared faces flitted about; but life was extinct, and there was no frantic riding for doctors.

There had been a hunt-breakfast that morning, and she well remembered the envy she had felt at seeing Lady Inez ride gaily forth with the rest on a favourite horse.

“She has everything,” thought Bella.

“ ‘Reindeer’ was promised to me when he was a foal, and I have never been on his back.”

But Lady Inez was lying there, with the mark of “Reindeer’s” iron hoof on her temple. They had come down together at a blind fence; the horse, entangled in her habit, struck out *once*, as thoroughbreds will, but it was a death-blow.

The voice of the child, crying alone and neglected in the nursery, aroused Bella from a horror-stricken stupor. Her father’s despair made him unapproachable, but she might comfort Bertie, forgotten by his attendants.

From this time she became almost a mother to him, for Mr. Du Meresq went abroad, and they were left alone in the deserted house for some years.

Bertie had left Eton, and just obtained a commission in the — Hussars, when his father died, leaving him a moderate fortune, which steadily decreased as years went by. It had approached attenuation by this time, and Mrs. Rolleston felt as distracted and perplexed as a duckling's hen foster-mother, at the vagaries of the happy-go-lucky, reckless Irish blood in Bertie, which did not flow in her own veins.

She looked forward to marrying him to Cecil, as the best chance of relieving his pecuniary difficulties and reforming his unsteadiness.

Captain Du Meresq had stayed with them for six weeks some time ago, when he and Cecil became inseparable companions, and it was then that the idea had dawned upon her. She would not

openly discuss it with her brother—that would have too much the appearance of a plot; but her lively satisfaction at the prospect was apparent enough, and Bertie knew her co-operation would not be wanting.

He had thought of it more than once. What chance had he not calculated to get him through his sea of difficulties; but a thousand a year alone seemed scarcely sufficient temptation to matrimony, to which he did not seriously incline. Indeed, his warm impressionable nature was not the temperament of a fortune-hunter.

He was attracted with Cecil, and got rather fond of her in the six weeks he had been trying to make her in love with him, not with any mercenary view, but because such was his usual custom with girls.

But he was afflicted with a keen eye for beauty, and Cecil was plain to most eyes, and too colourless for his taste, though she possessed a lovely figure, thoroughbred little head, and a pale, intelligent, expressive face.

Bluebell's lilies and roses and Hebe-like contour caught his eye in a moment, of which Cecil felt an instinctive conviction; but though, with a woman's keenness, underrating no point of attraction in her friend, she considered her wanting in style, which deficiency she dwelt on now with secret satisfaction. For though not in the least anxious to monopolize general admiration, that of Bertie Du Meresq was unfortunately a sensitive point with Cecil, for that six weeks had been the intensest period of her life—the dawning of “love’s young dream.”

She had never met him since childhood till then, when they were thrown together with the intimacy of near connexions. There was not, of course, the slightest real relationship, but Bertie jestingly called her his niece, perhaps to establish a right of chaperonage.

He used to make her come down to breakfast *en Amazone*, and took her the most enchanting rides in that seductive April weather. Her equestrian experience previously had been limited to steady macadamizing on the roads. Bertie took her as the crow flies, never pulled down a fence, but merely gave her a lead, and Cecil, who had plenty of nerve, exulted in the new excitement. The farmers might not have thought it a very orthodox month for this amusement; but hunting was scarcely over, though

the copses were filled with primroses, and violets scented the hedgerows; the birds sang as they only do when the great business of their year is commencing. And then she had such a mount, a perfect hunter of her *quasi*-uncle's. It never refused, and took its fences with such ease a child might have sat it.

Or they would ride dreamily on in woody glades, both alike susceptible to the shafts of sunlight quivering on the leaves, the sudden gush of fragrance after a shower, and all the myriad appeals of spring to those who have that touch of poetry in their clay which is the key of fairy-land, their horses mean time snatching at the young green boughs as they sauntered lazily on; and Du Meresq, who had travelled in all sorts of strange out-of-the-way places,

described weirder scenes in other lands, and pictured a fuller, more vivid life than she in her routine existence had dreamed of.

Bertie was always all in all to the woman he was with, provided no other was present; and Cecil, young, and full of sympathy and intelligence, was a delightful companion. His appreciation, felt and expressed, of her quickness of comprehension was most agreeable flattery; the more so as he confided in her so fully, even consulting her about his own private affairs, for he was very hard pressed at this time, and she, who had never known the want of money, took the deepest interest in it all.

He seemed never able to bear her out of his sight. If she played, he was hanging over the piano; if he had

letters to write, Cecil must do it from his dictation; and yet he would avow sometimes before her such extravagant adoration for some pretty girl, that Cecil, chilled and surprised, would feel more than ever doubtful of her own influence; and the honeyed words she had treasured up, faded away as void of significance. And then one day,—suddenly,—on her return from a croquet-party, she heard he had received a telegram, and gone, leaving a careless message of adieu.

Poor Cecil! with the instinct of the wounded animal to its lair, she rushed to her own room, locked the door, and walked about in a tearless abandonment of grief, disappointment, and surprise. How could he leave her without one word? She felt half stunned, and her brain seemed capable of only the

dull reiteration that "Bertie was gone." Tears welled up to her eyes then, when the sound of the first dinner-bell drove them back. She felt she must battle alone with this strange affliction ; and trying to efface from her features all evidence of the shock she had sustained, descended to dinner, looking rather more stately than usual.

It annoyed her to observe that her step-mother glanced deprecatingly at her, and was inclined to be extra affectionate. This would never do. Like most young girls, she was generally rather silent when not interested in the discussions of her elders. But now she never let conversation drop. The incidents of the croquet-party furnished a safe topic. Colonel Rolleston thought the gentle dissipation had made his daughter

quite lively. Afterwards she took refuge at the piano, which was imprudent, for music only too surely touches the chord of feeling, and every piece was associated with Bertie. Cecil shut the instrument, and effected a strategical retreat to her bed-room, where, in the luxury of solitude, she might worry and torment herself to her heart's content. His absence was trial enough, but the sting lay in the way it was done, which was such a proof of indifference, that shame urged her to crush out all thoughts of him, and suffer anything rather than let him see the impression his careless affection had made on her.

And so Cecil passed through her first "baptism of fire" alone and unsuspected; but time had softened much of her resentment ere they met again.



CHAPTER III.

GENTLE ANNIE.

The time I've lost in wooing,
In watching and pursuing
The light that lies
In woman's eyes,
Has been my heart's undoing.

MOORE.

“BLUEBELL,” said little Lola, bursting into the nursery, where Freddy, rather a tyrant in his affections, had insisted on her singing him to sleep, “Ma says you have got to dine down to-night, and Miss Prosody too. Won’t she be in a way, for her white muslin never came home from the wash, and she had begun altering the *barége*; so I asked Fleda to tell her,” said Lola, diplomatically. “Do you know

Bertie has come?" (His nieces never prefaced his name with the formality of uncle.) "Oh, of course, you must have seen him at the Rink. Do you like him? He he is sure to like you, at first, at any rate," said Lola, who apparently, like other lookers-on, saw most of the game. "And don't tell, but I believe he hates Miss Prosody."

"Why?" asked Bluebell, absently.

"Well, one day he was whispering to Cecil, with their heads very near together. Miss Prosody was looking for a book in a recess behind the door, close to them; but they never saw her till she moved away, and I heard Bertie mutter something about an 'inquisitive old devil.' But don't tell, mind. There's the bell; I must go to tea." *Exit* Lola, and Bluebell flew off with some alacrity to her bed-room to prepare.

"Bluebell," cried Cecil, opening the intervening door, "can I lend you anything?" It pleased her to supply her friend's deficiencies of toilet when a sudden summons to a domestic field-day had been issued.

"Is it a party?" said the other. "I have only my eternal black-net dress."

"Just Mr. Vavasour and Captain Deveril," both in her father's regiment; they never, either of them, alluded to Bertie. "Here are some fixings for it," returning with a lapful of silver acorns and oak leaves, "unless you would prefer butter-cups. What a thing it is to have a complexion like yours, that everything goes with,"—and Cecil looked with half envy at the girl, whose blue eyes were bluer, and hair and cheeks brighter, than usual, as she chattered away with a viva-

city, of which, perhaps, the flattering glances of Captain Du Meresq may have been the secret spring.

Bluebell hadn't the slightest idea of assuming the demure demeanour of a governess in society; the Rollestons had been her great friends before, and did not treat her as if she was in any altered position; not so, however, Miss Prosody, who would have reduced her to the *status* of a nursery-maid had it been in her power.

That austere virgin was talking, or rather listening, in a sympathetic manner to Colonel Rolleston as the girls entered the room; but her eye had taken in every detail of Miss Leigh's costume, and disapprovingly remarked the silver oak leaves that festooned the black-net dress, and Maltese cross and bracelets that ac-

accompanied it, all of which she well knew belonged to Cecil.

The three young men were talking together.

"Du Meresq," said Captain Deveril, "you get more leave than any other fellow. You were in the Prairies in July, England in the spring, and now here you are at large again in January."

"You must have a rattling good chief," said Mr. Vavasour. "I don't think, Mrs. Rolleston, the Colonel is ever able to spare us quite so often."

"You see," said Bertie, "there's no demand for leave among our fellows just now; they are all in love at Montreal, and there's so much going on there. Lascelles most imprudently gave up his to drive Miss Ellery about a little longer."

"Oh, ah, I know her," said young

Vavasour; "girl with grey eyes, and head always on one side when she's valsing; looks as if she was kissing her own shoulder."

"Will she land him, do you think?" said Deveril.

"Not she," said Bertie. "I have known him in as bad a scrape before; he'll get away to England soon; he always bolts when the family become affectionate."

A discordant gong resounding through the house was followed by the announcement of dinner.

"Come, my dear Miss Prosody," said the Colonel, complacently, leading her forth; he hadn't near done his recital of the morning's field-day, which required that delicate tact and judicious prompting to extort from him that, though not really Brigadier on the occasion, his

opinion and authority had actually directed the proceedings.

Generally any amount of this affectionate incense was forthcoming from his wife and daughter; but to-night they both seemed a little *distract* and occupied with Bertie, which, however, was a loss little felt with Miss Prosody present, whose motto seemed that of the volunteers, "Always ready," and her "soothing treatment" was certainly equal to that of either of the others.

"It's you and I, Miss Bluebell," said young Vavasour, hastily offering his arm, while Bertie, who had hesitated an instant, gave his to Cecil. The momentary reluctance was not lost upon her, she became rather silent, ditto Captain Du Meresq; but their opposite neighbours were in a full flow of chatter.

"I saw you at the Rink, Miss Leigh. I wish I could skate like you. What is that thing you do with a broom?"

"The rose."

"Take a great deal of cultivating to produce, I should think? Are you going to the M'Nabs' ball?"

"No; I am not asked. The others are."

"But you do go to balls sometimes?"

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Rolleston promised I should; but I can't go without an invitation, and I very seldom get one."

"I daresay not," said Jack, hotly; "they don't want their daughters cut out."

"Stuff," cried Bluebell, with a sudden blush, which was not occasioned by the remark, but by the expression of Bertie Du Meresq's eyes that she had caught for about the third time since dinner began.

It was very provoking; they had a sort of magnetic power, that forced her to look that way, and she fancied she detected a half-pleased smile in recognition of the involuntary suffusion.

“We are going to ‘fix up a prance’ after the garrison sleigh-drive on the 10th,” continued young Vavasour; “will you come in my sleigh, Miss Leigh?”

Bluebell’s face brightened with anticipation; then she looked down, and demurred,—“I don’t know that I shall be able to go.”

“That’s only a put off, I am sure; you came out last garrison sleigh-drive.”

“Yes, because Colonel Rolleston took me in his, but I musn’t expect to go every time; and you see there’s Freddy; but I *should* like it awfully, Mr. Vavasour.”

“Well, I know they will make you

come," said he, confidently. "Promise me you won't drive with any other fellow."

"No fear of that; I don't suppose any one else will ask me."

"Wouldn't they," thought Vavasour. "I know two or three of our fellows are death on driving her."

"Cecil," said Bertie, suddenly, "I think you have grown much quieter."

"I am sure I might make the same remark, and for the purposes of conversation it requires two to talk."

"You are so stiff, or something," murmured he; "not a bit like the jolly little girl who used to ride with me in the Farley woods. Those were pleasant days, Cecil—at least, *I* thought so."

"You got very suddenly tired of them, however."

"That I didn't," exclaimed he. "I was obliged to go."

"It was a yachting excursion, wasn't it?" carelessly.

"Yes, ostensibly; I had business too. Do you know, Cecil, I very nearly wrote to you. But then, I thought you wouldn't care to hear from me, and might think it a bore answering."

Cecil was silent. "Did you miss me, my child?"

She forgot her resolves, and met his eyes with a dark, soft look.

Bertie pressed her hand under the table, and for a moment they were oblivious of anything passing around.

"Sweet or dry, sir?" said the deep voice of the liveried bôtmán, for the second time of asking.

Du Meresq darted a searching glance

at the man, who looked as stolid as the sergeant in "Ours." No one could have guessed he was thinking what a *piquante* anecdote it would be to relate to his innamorata, the cook, over their supper-beer. Bertie gave a laughing but relieved glance at his neighbour, whose eyes were fixed on her plate. They both simultaneously began talking louder, with an exaggerated openness, on general topics. Mrs. Rolleston joined in.

"You must stay over the sleighing-party, Bertie."

"I hate driving a hired sleigh," said he. "I wish I could get mine up; but the Grand Trunk would be sure to deliver it the day after the fair."

"But you have your musk-ox robes here; they would dress up the shabbiest sleigh. I only saw one set like them on

New Year's Day, when we had at least sixty sleighs up here."

"How did you enjoy that celebration?"

"I think," said Cecil, "it is rather tiresome for ladies to have to stay in all day and receive, while the gentlemen go out calling. We had a spread, of course—luncheon, tea, coffee, everything. One man, who had a large acquaintance, came before breakfast, and they were rushing in all day. It would have been well enough if they were not in such a hurry; but they just swallowed a glass of wine, and the burden of all their remarks was, 'I have been to a dozen places already, and have about thirty or forty more to do.'"

"Could not you two young ladies make them linger over smiles and wine?" laughed Bertie. "We are not such duffers at Montreal."

“No, indeed. I saw Bluebell give a man a scalding cup of coffee, with the most engaging smile. There was a nervous glance at the clock. ‘Oh, thank you, Miss Leigh; how hot it is! I shall never have time to drink it,’ just as if he had a train to catch.”

“They have an arrear of balls and dinners to call for; that is the only day in the year a good many ever can pay visits—the civilians, I mean.”

The Colonel, who had now exhausted conversation with Miss Prosody, had leisure to observe the determined flirtation of young Vavasour with Bluebell. That unformidable young person being only seventeen, of course looked upon him as a mere boy, and her chaffing manner was not at all to the Colonel’s taste, whose attention was drawn to it by an expres-

sive glance from Miss Prosody; so he telegraphed to his wife, who soon signalled her female following from the room.

Bertie got to the door, and as Bluebell passed through last of the ladies, she again met that look of interest and admiration Du Meresq had practised so often.

Shyness hitherto had been no infirmity of this young Canadian's; but Bertie somehow had mesmerized her into a state of consciousness—it was a cobwebby kind of fetter, but the first she had worn.

“Come and talk to me, Bluebell,” said Mrs. Rolleston, “as Cecil is so studious.”

The former glanced at her friend, and involuntarily whispered,—“*How* well she looks to-night!”

Cecil was sitting apart, utterly absent as it seemed, but her eyes were shining, and there was a soft brightness about her

as she turned over the pages of a book. It was 'The Wanderer,'—one that Bertie had brought with him.

Mrs. Rolleston agreed and interpreted it her own way. Bluebell drew a long rocking-chair by her side, and they fell into a pleasant little talk. Mrs. Rolleston always made a pet of this child; she was the best of step-mothers, but stood a little in awe of Cecil.

Du Meresq came in shortly before the rest; the elder girl did not even look up, but her face again lit. He stood *à l'Anglais*, with his back to the fire, talking to his sister, and occasionally, though without any particular *empressement*, addressing Bluebell, who thought his voice sweeter than any man's she had ever heard. It made her unconsciously modulate her own, which as yet had the untuned accents of

early girlhood ; but the spell was on her, and she felt, for the first time, at a loss for words. Yet when Mrs. Rolleston shortly after sent her to the piano, it was more of a disappointment than a relief. Some one was following to turn the leaves—only Mr. Vavasour—odious, officious boy ! Who wanted him ?

“ Pray, don’t,” cried she, pettishly.
“ You are sure to do it all wrong.”

“ Let me try,” pleaded Jack. “ If you just look at me I shall know when to turn.”

“ Well, see if you can bring that book” (indicating a very heavy one at the bottom of a pile) “without spilling the rest, or dropping it on your toes. Thank you. Now you had better go away ; this is not at all the sort of music you would understand.”

“Classical, I suppose. I am afraid my taste is too uncultivated.”

“Come, Miss Leigh,” said the Colonel, half-impatiently, “we are all expectation.”

Bertie had approached Cecil and taken up the book she was reading. It was open at ‘Aux Italiens,’ and he murmured low some of the verses:—

“I thought of the dress she wore last time,
When we stood 'neath the cypress trees together,
In that lost land, in that soft clime,
In the crimson evening weather.
Of her muslin dress, for the eve was hot,
And her warm white neck in its golden chain,
And her full soft hair, just tied in a knot,
And falling loose again.”

Mrs. Rolleston thought they looked very like lovers bending over the same book, and their eyes speaking to each other, and in harmony with it went rippling on one of the wildest and most plaintive of the Lieders under Bluebell's sympathetic and brilliant fingers.

"What a magnificent touch that child has!" said Du Meresq, pausing to listen.

"She has quite a genius for music;" and, mentally, she commented, "I never heard her play better."

"She plays," said Bertie, "as if she were desperately in love."

"With Mr. Vavasour?" laughed Cecil.

"With no one, I dare say. It indicates, however, a *besoin d'aimer*."

Cecil took up 'The Wanderer' again, but she soon found they were not *en rapport*. The capricious temperament was now, ear and fancy, under the spell of the fair musician.

Bertie was soon by the piano, but Bluebell ceased almost directly after. He had brought from Montreal the Christy's Minstrel Melodies, then just out, and asked her to try one. She excused herself on the

plea that it was a man's song, so he began it himself. Who has not suffered from the male amateur, who comes forward with bashful fatuity to favour the company with a strain tame and inaudible as a nervous school girl's? Bertie was no musician, and his songs were all picked up by ear; but there was a passion and *timbre* in the tenor voice, fascinating if unskilful, and the refrain of 'Gentle Annie,'

"Shall we never more behold her,
Never hear that winning voice again,
Till the spring time comes, gentle Annie,
Till the wild flowers are scattered o'er the plain?"

lingered with its mournful, tender inflection in more than one ear that night.

Afterwards the two young men from the barracks, muffled to the chin in buffalo robes, lit the inevitable cigar, and jingled merrily off to the music of the bells.



CHAPTER IV.

SATURDAY AT HOME.

Unhasp the lock—like elves set free,
Flit out old memories ;
A strange glow gathers round my heart,
Strange moisture dims mine eyes.

LAWRANCE.

CECIL woke the next morning with the feeling that something pleasant had happened ; and then she remembered that Bertie Du Meresq was actually in the house, and the old folly as likely as ever to begin again ; but, not possessing the self-examining powers of Anthony Trollope's heroines, she made no attempt to argue herself out of her unreasonable happiness, and, indeed, dwelt far more than necessary on the warm, sudden hand-clasp so

inopportunately witnessed by full private Bowers. She came down radiant, and looking positively handsome; but when did a too sunny dawn escape a cloud ere noon? Bertie seemed different somehow,—was not certain he could get more leave,—was even doubtful about asking for it; and Cecil's mental Mercury, which had been "set fair," went down to "change." In reality, Du Meresq not being so etherealized by love, felt out of sorts, and not up to the mark that morning, and, therefore, probably opined with Moore—

"Thus should woman's heart and looks,
At noon be cold as winter brooks,
Nor kindle till the night returning
Brings their genial hour for burning."

At any rate, he actually went to the barracks with the Colonel, "as if he couldn't get enough of that," thought Cecil, "when he is not on leave."

But after severe reflections on herself for caring a straw about it, Cecil had forgiven him, and a deceitful sunbeam peeped through in the prospect of meeting at luncheon, only to be again overcast, as the Colonel returned without the recreant Bertie.

This second reverse overthrew her afternoon arrangements, for she had reckoned on Du Meresq's escort to the Rink. This being Saturday, Bluebell always went home till the following day, and Mrs. Rolleston would not be available even for a drive, for she hated sleighing, and was looking forward to writing her English letters in the cozy drawing-room, and sociably imbibing afternoon tea with any visitors hardy enough to face the bitter north-wester, happily so rare a visitant in that sufficiently inclement climate.

But Cecil preferred facing any weather

to her own thoughts, and, encountering three Astrakhan-jacketed and fur-capped sisters under convoy of Miss Prosody, was carried off by them to enliven their dismal constitutional.

In the mean time, Captain Du Meresq, having lunched at the barracks, drove with Mr. Vavasour to the Rink, expecting to find both girls there: but speculating rather the most on the chance of a more unrestrained conversation with Bluebell than he cared for under the eyes of her responsible guardians. His projects also were to prove futile, for that young person was speeding over the frozen tract on the common at the time. The snow was as dry and hard as powdered sugar, and her cloud was stiff with her frozen breath; her ears felt as though she had thrust them into a holly-bush; and the razor-like wind in that unsheltered spot must have arrested

the circulation of any less healthy and youthful pedestrian. The morning had dawned prosperously for her, as Mrs. Rolleston had accorded permission to join the sleigh-party, the *summum bonum* of her hopes; and the gratification was rendered more complete by a charming present from Cecil of an ermine cap, muff lined with scarlet, and ermine neck-tie, fastened by its cunning little head and tail.

Bluebell was picturing their effect on the velveteen jacket, hitherto so coldly furnished forth, and thinking that Cecil must have ordered them from Montreal with a view to this party, as they had arrived so opportunely. She remembered now that Lola had, apparently, been struggling with a secret for some days; and yet, when she, Bluebell, had been so ecstatic, Cecil had seemed more thoughtful than sympathetic, and, merely

acknowledging her thanks by a quiet kiss, had escaped from the room.

Two expectant faces were peering over the blind at the cottage, watching the gay footsteps battling across the common. Even Aunt Jane looked forward to seeing this weekly messenger from the outer world, which, needless to say, kept well aloof from these poor and insignificant ladies.

Bluebell always brought every piece of gossip she could collect to feed Miss Opie's inquisitive mind, who was in no way exempt from the sin supposed to most easily beset spinsterhood; and her girlish spirits brightened the quiet cottage, and left their echo behind through the dull week. She was by no means an unmixed good when she lived there. Her vivacity, having nothing to expend itself on, often turned to desperate fits of discontent and *ennui*;

but now, coming home was a holiday and change.

All the inhabitants, old ladies, and new girl (for each successive one went away to better herself after a few weeks' residence), assembled simultaneously at the hall-door, and drew their visitor from the bitter blast into the stove-lit parlour. One yet more humble welcomer was there, of the vagabond tribe,—petty larceny in every curve of his ungainly form, and his spirit so broken by adversity, that he only ventured to wag his shabby tail in recognition of his benefactress.


This was Bluebell's casual—one of a too common race in Canada of homeless, starved animals, there being no "Refuge" or dog-tax to compel them to live under protection or not at all.

This reclaimed cur, after overcoming his strong suspicion of poison, had sup-

ported himself for some time on the food Bluebell placed for him in the shed; and when, emboldened by hunger and the handsome treatment he had received, he ventured into the house, he was authorized to remain as watch-dog and protector.

In the summer, too, horses were added to her pensioners, and invited in to graze on the patch of enclosed grass at the back of the cottage, till it fell short from being burned up or eaten; for the common was haunted with gaunt, famished quadrupeds, who, in the drought of summer, were still left to look for the mockery of subsistence on the bare, parched ground.

It was a cheerful party gathered round the tea-table, quite lavishly set forth in honour of the guest. Scones and tea-cakes were plenteously saturated with butter, regardless of its winter price (the



old ladies would breakfast on bread-and-scrape the rest of the week with uncomplaining self-denial), and a heavy plum cake formed the *pièce de résistance*.

Trove, for olfactory reasons, was accommodated with his share on a rug in the passage. Bluebell was the chief talker, with her week's arrears of news. Captain Du Meresq's arrival created a little buzz of interest.

"Is he handsome?" asked Mrs. Leigh, sentimentally, whose thoughts had flown back to earlier days.

Bluebell looked up with an odd, perplexed glance. "Upon my word, I don't know."

"Ah! there were more good-looking people in my day," said her mother. "There was Captain Fletcher, in your poor father's regiment, the handsomest man that was ever seen,—fresh-coloured,

with golden whiskers, and long, drooping moustache. All we girls were wild about him. Is Captain Du Meresq at all like that?"

"Not in the least. I can't describe him—fine-shaped head, such strange eyes. Oh! I dare say you would think him hideous," with a conscious laugh.

Miss Opie coughed suspiciously. "It is unfortunate," said she, "when you are in such a pleasant situation, that any disturbing element should enter. I hope, Bluebell, you will be very circumspect in your demeanour towards this gentleman."

"What," said Bluebell, in demure imitation of her manner, "would you consider an appropriate attitude for me to assume towards him?"

"These fine Captains are too fond of turning young girls' heads," said Miss Opie, shaking her own; "'leading captive

silly women,' as we read. If he attempt any foolish, trifling conversation, you should check it with cold civility."

Bluebell burst into an irreverent fit of laughter, and even Mrs. Leigh said,—“Oh, those are your English ideas, Aunt Jane; we are not so stiff in Canada.”

Miss Opie having been a governess for ten years in the mother country, was looked upon as a naturalized Briton.

“I think the old country must be very dull,” said Bluebell. “Miss Prosody is always pursing up her mouth and bridleing if I laugh and talk with any of the officers; and one day I distinctly overheard her whisper to the Colonel,—‘Very forward,’ and nod towards me.”

“It is, however, well to profit by such remarks,” returned Miss Opie; “there is doubtless some truth in them, however unpalatable.”

"But," urged the girl, "Colonel Rolleston can't *bear* one to be silent or dull; he always asks if one isn't well; and I shouldn't think you could call Captain Du Meresq a flirt. Why, he has hardly spoken ten words to me yet,"—but a sudden glow came to her cheeks as she remembered how many he had looked.

"Well, well, I was only warning you. Fetch the backgammon board; your mother has won seven games and I nine since you went."

Bluebell complied, and, settling the ladies on either side of a papier-maché table, opened the piano, and began dreamily playing through the music of the night before. Trove, finding the door ajar, had pushed in, and lay near the instrument, listening in that strange way some dogs do if the tones come from the heart, and not merely the fingers.

Having got through the last evening's *répertoire*, she sat musing on the music-stool, and then crooned rather low an old song of her mother's, beginning,—

“They tell me thou art the favoured guest
In many a gay and brilliant throng;
No wit like thine to wake the jest,
No voice like thine to raise the song.”

“Oh! that is too old-fashioned,” said Mrs. Leigh, and Miss Opie coughed dryly. But why need Bluebell have blushed so consciously, as she dashed into Lightning galops and Tom Tiddler quadrilles, till Trove, like a dog of taste, took his offended ears and outraged nerves off to his lair in the lobby?

His fair mistress soon after sought her bower, a scantily furnished retreat, but, like most girls' rooms, taking a certain amount of individuality from its occupier. Everything in the little room was blue,

and each article a present. Photographs of school friends were suspended from the wall with ribbons of her name-sake colour. It was in the earlier days of the art, when a stony stare, pursed lips, and general rigidity were considered essential to the production of the portrait.

Blue, also, were the pincushion and glass toilet implements on the dressing-table, and a rocking-chair had its cushion embroidered in bluebells—a tribute of affection from a late schoolfellow.

The bed was curtainless, and neutral except as to its blue valance, and the carpet only cocoa-nut matting, which, however, harmonized fairly with the prevailing cerulean effect.

Bluebell was writing in a book, guarded by a Bramah, some profound reflections on "First Impressions." She never lost the key nor forgot to lock this volume—a

saving clause of common-sense protecting a farrago of nonsense.

“Ces beaux jours, quand j’étais si malheureux.” Have you ever, reader, taken up an old journal written in early youth, and thought how those intensely black and white days have now mingled into unnoticeable grey, half-thankful that the old ghosts are laid, half-regretful for that keener susceptibility to joy and sorrow gone by? Then, as “the hand that has written it lays it aside,” there is, perhaps, a pang at the reflection of how the paths now diverge of those who once walked together as—

“Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses—or wives;
And marriage, and death, and division,
Make barren our lives.”

But Bluebell knows nothing of that. She is at the scribbling age, and can

actually endure to describe, as if they were new and entirely original, the dawning follies of seventeen.

In England a heroine might have wound up such sentimental exercises with gazing out on the moonlit scene ; but nine degrees below zero was unfavourable for the wooing of Diana. The " cold light of stars " was no poetical figure, and Bluebell, frozen back to the prosaic, piled up the stove, and crept into bed, where her waking dreams soon merged into sleeping ones.





CHAPTER V.

A WOODLAND WALK.

I hope, pretty maid, you won't take it amiss,
If I tell you my reason for asking you this,
I would see you safe home (now the swain was
love),
Of such a companion if you would approve.
Your offer, kind shepherd, is civil, I own,
But I see no great danger in going alone ;
Nor yet can I hinder, the road being free
For one as another, for you as for me.

It was Sunday afternoon. Bluebell was on her way to the Maples, and had not proceeded far when she observed a Robinson Crusoe-looking figure in one of those grotesque fur caps and impossible hooded blankets that the fashionable Briton in Canada so fondly affects. She was speculating idly upon whom it could be.

"Not Mr. Gordon, though the 'Fool's-cap' is like his; and Major Simeon has one of those. Oh, Captain Du Meresq!"

She bowed rather undecidedly, and then moved on abruptly.

But Bertie did not pass by.

"Are you returning?" asked he. "They can't get on without you. Freddy has dropped a cinder into his nurse's tea, and set fire to the straw in the cat's basket."

Bluebell laughed shyly.

"I have been to see mamma. Do not let me bring you out of your way, Captain Du Meresq,"—for he had turned back with her.

"Oh, I was only going for a walk," said Bertie, innocently,—a harmless amusement that, without any other object, he was simply incapable of undertaking. "Hadn't I better see you home; there's a brute of a dog down there, who sprang out at me?"

I broke my stick across his head, and then, of course, I had to apologize, being disarmed."

"I know that fierce dog. He belongs to a cabman; but I always speak to him, and he never attacks me."

"Even a lion itself would flee from a maid in the pride of her purity," laughed Bertie. "But, Miss Leigh, must we positively go shivering across this bleak desert again?—isn't there some sheltered way through the wood?"

"There certainly is; but it is three miles round, and, I dare say, full of drifts."

"Never mind, all the better fun. Up this way?"

"Oh, but isn't it late? I think they will be expecting me before."

"There's nobody at home, if that's all," said Bertie. "They have gone to the

Cathedral, and most likely will turn in to tea at the Van Calmonts."

The scrambling walk was a temptation, the common hideous and cold.

"We must walk very quick, then."

"Run, if you like. Come along, there's a dear child."

Bluebell coloured furiously.

"Maybe I wont go at all now!"

"That is so like a girl," said Bertie, impatiently; "standing coquetting in the cold. Now, you are offended. What did I say? Only called you a child."

"You had no business to speak so," said Bluebell, angry at his familiar manner, but rather at a loss for words. "Why can't you call me Miss Leigh, like everybody else?"—and the indignant little beauty paused, with hot cheeks, and feeling desperately awkward.

Du Meresq bit his lip to hide a smile.

He was half afraid she would dash off and terminate the interview.

“Dear me!” said he. “When you are a little older you will think youth a very good fault. Will you forgive me this once, Miss Leigh, and I will not call you anything else?—for the present” (*sotto voce*).

Bluebell was mollified, and rather proud of the good effects of her reproof, notwithstanding the half-inaudible rider. Du Meresq, also, was satisfied, for, without further opposition, they had struck into the wood. Unused to the Britannic hamper of a chaperone, Bluebell saw nothing singular in the proceeding. So they crunched over the snow, keeping, as far as possible, the dazzling track marked by the wheels of the sleigh-waggon, and plentifully powdered by the snow-laden trees; now up to their knees in a drift, from which Bertie had the pleasure of

extricating his companion, who forgot her shyness in the difficulties of the path, and, not being given to silence, was laughing and talking away unreservedly.

“What a strange girl she is!” thought Bertie. “Who would think, to hear her chattering now, she *could* have made that prim little speech? I must not go on too fast; it reminds me of that Irish girl who said, the first time I squeezed her hand, ‘Ah, Captain Du Meresq, but you are such a bould flirt!’”

Sheltered from the bleak wind the walk on the crisp track was enjoyable enough; the “strange eyes,” being now on a line with and not confronting her, were less embarrassing, and the slight awe she still felt of him only gave a piquancy to the companionship.

“Are you not very glad we came this way?” Bertie was saying.

"If we had only snow-shoes," cried the breathless Bluebell, for the third time slipping into a drift, but struggling out before Du Meresq could do more than catch her hand.

"Poor little fingers! how cold they are," trying to put them in with his own into his large beaver gloves.

"Oh, I wish you would be sensible," stammered Bluebell, much confused.

"What's the use of being sensible," retorted he, "when it is so much pleasanter being otherwise? Time enough for that when anybody's by."

But Bluebell wrenched her hand away, bringing off the glove, which she threw on the snow.

"Is that a challenge, Miss Bluebell? Must I take up the gauntlet? Good gracious, my dear child, you are not really annoyed? Well, we will be sensible, as

you call it. Only you must begin; I don't know how."

"Evidently," said Bluebell, very tartly, drawing as far away as the exigencies of the track would admit. She could hold her own well enough with the young subalterns she had hitherto flirted with, but this man was older, and had a bewildering effect on her."

"Are you and Cecil great friends?" asked Bertie, presently, with the air of having forgotten the little fracas.

"I hope so," coming out of her offended silence at this neutral topic. "I know I like her well enough."

"And do you tell each other everything, after the manner of young ladies?"

"No-o," said Bluebell, reflectively; "not like the girls at school. You see Cecil is older than I, and cleverer, I suppose, and doesn't talk much nonsense."

"Did she ever speak of me?" asked Bertie.

"Hardly ever; the others have mentioned you often."

"Cecil is a very sensible girl," with a re-assured countenance; "and as you never talk nonsense, I suppose you wont mention the trivial fact of our having taken this walk?"

"Why in the world not?" opening her large violet eyes full upon him.

" 'Speech is silver, but silence is golden,' you unsophisticated child," returned he, enigmatically.

Bluebell considered. "Why, of course, I shall tell Mrs. Rolleston what made me so late."

"But not if she doesn't ask you?"

"But why not? There is no *harm* in it," said the girl, persistently.

"No, no; but if you had lived as long

as I, you would know that people *always* try and interfere with anything pleasant. I should so like to take this walk with you every week, Bluebell."

Bluebell looked down; she was vaguely flattered by his caring to repeat the walk which she thought must be so unimportant to him, — it would be something to look forward to, for she *had* enjoyed it, though she could not tell why.

"But, Captain Du Meresq—" she began.

"Call me Bertie, when we are alone," said he.

They had entered on the street, Bluebell was wavering, but the last sentence, "when we are alone," struck her ear unpleasantly.

"How can I?" said she; "I do not know you well enough."

"Walk with me sometimes," whispered Bertie, "and that reason will disappear,

but don't say a word about it to-day, there's a dear girl. I had better make tracks for the club; you will be at home in five minutes,"—and Du Meresq ceremoniously lifted his cap, for many eyes were about, and disappeared down another block.

Bluebell, on finding herself alone, went through a disagreeable reaction. It was certainly only a few yards to her destination; but it was annoying to be left so abruptly, and an air of secrecy thrown over her actions too. Did she like him, or hate him? She could not determine; her fancy and her vanity were both touched, doubtless; then, remembering Miss Opie's exhortations, a gleam of fun twinkled in her eyes as she thought of what her horror would have been at Bertie's affectionate ease of manner.

All the same she crept into the house,

feeling very underhand and uncomfortable. None of the party had returned, so reprieved for the present she went up to the nursery.

Freddy was roaring on his back, he had just thrown 'Peep-of-Day' at the nurse's head, which had been unwisely offered to him as a substitute for his favourite trumpet, when its excruciating blasts became too unbearable.

"Oh, I'm sure I am glad you have come back, miss, for I don't know how to abide that wearyin' child, as don't know what a whipping is. Here's your governess, sir, as will put you in the corner."

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" cried Freddy, with supreme contempt.

The *suaviter in modo* was, indeed, the only treatment allowed in that nursery. Bluebell retreated with a highly-coloured scrap-book to the window, which she

feigned complete absorption in. Freddy glanced at it out of the tail of his eye.

“Show me that, Boobell.”

“I don’t know, Freddy,” said the girl, feeling some slight moral coercion incumbent on her. “Do you *think* you will call nurse a fool again?”

“She shouldn’t bother,” said the infant, confidentially, climbing into her lap, but declining to commit himself to any pledges of good behaviour. “Show me the book.”

Half-an-hour after, Mrs. Rolleston looking in, saw a pretty little picture—the old nurse was nodding in a rocking-chair. Bluebell’s fair young face was bending over Freddy, seated on her lap, with an arm round her neck, his cherubic visage beaming with interest as he listened to the classic tale of ‘Three Wishes.’ It was easier to her to continue the recital, while

a dread of being questioned prevented her looking up.

“Bluebell is telling Freddy such a beautiful fairy story,” said Mrs. Rolleston, to some one who had followed her to the nursery.

“I wish she would tell fairy stories to me,” said Bertie.





CHAPTER VI.

VISITORS.

In aught that from me lures thine eyes
My jealousy has trial ;
The lightest cloud across the skies
Has darkness for the dial.

LORD LYTTON.

BLUEBELL had no difficulty in preserving silence about the Sunday's escapade. It never occurred to Mrs. Rolleston to inquire what time she had returned, and an evasive answer to Cecil was all that it entailed. But she was very much perplexed by the change in Captain Du Meresq's manner. The cold civility recommended by Miss Opie seemed all on his side. Nothing but good-humoured indifference was apparent in

his manner. Their acquaintance did not seem to have progressed further than the first evening; indeed, it had rather retrograded; and she could almost imagine she had *dreamt* the tender speeches he had lavished on her in the Humber woods.

Cecil and he were out sleighing most afternoons, and Bluebell was thrown on nursery and school-room for companionship—insipid pabulum to the vanity of a young lady in her first glimpse of conquest, and who believed she had stricken down a quarry worthy of her bow. Having nothing to distract her, she considered the problem exhaustively from morning till night, and, if she were not in love with him before, she had got him into her head now, if not into her heart. His being so much with Cecil did not strike her as any clue to the mystery. They were relations, of course, or nearly

the same thing ; there was no flirting in their matter-of-fact intercourse.

Cecil found her one afternoon reading over the bed-room fire, in a somewhat desponding attitude. Miss Rolleston had just come in from a drive, her slight form shrouded in sealskins, an air of brightness and vivacity replacing her usual rather languid manner.

"You wouldn't think it was snowing from my cloak," cried she. "It is though—quite a heavy fall, if you can call anything so light heavy. We were quite white when we came in, but it shakes off without wetting."

"It won't be very good sleighing, then, to-morrow, and the wind is getting up, too."

"And what have you been doing, Bluebell?"

"I walked with the children and Miss

Prosody in the Queen's Park," said the latter, rather dolefully.

"And it was very cold and stupid, I suppose?" said Cecil, kindly. "Come down to the drawing-room and try some duets."

There were two or three visitors below and Bertie, and some tea was coming in. They were looking at a painting of Cecil's just returned from being mounted as a screen. It was a group of brilliant autumn leaves — the gorgeous maple, with its capricious hues, an arrow-shaped leaf, half red, half green, like a parrot's feather, contrasting with another "spotted like the pard," and then one blood-red. The collecting of them had been an interest to the children in their daily walks, and Cecil had arranged them with artistic effect.

One of the visitors was a rather pretty

girl, whom Bluebell had known formerly. She gave her, however, only a distant bow, while she answered with the greatest animation any observation of Captain Du Meresq's. This young lady was to be one of the sleighing party next day, and, as far as she could admit such a humiliating fact, was trying to convey to him that she was as yet unappropriated for any particular sleigh.

"Who is to drive you, Miss Rolleston?" asked she, suspecting, from his backwardness in coming forward, that the object of her intentions might be engaged there.

"I am going in the last sleigh, with Major Fane. We take the luncheon and pay the turnpikes. He is Vice-President this time."

"By-the-bye, Du Meresq," said the Colonel, rather exercised to find a lady

of the party without a swain, "whom have you asked?"

"Oh, everybody is engaged," said Bertie, mendaciously ignoring Miss Kendal's half-admission of being open to an offer. "I shall not join the drive at all, unless," he added, in a hesitating manner, as if it was a sudden thought, "Miss Leigh will compassionate me, and allow me to take charge of her."

Bluebell, confused by this unexpected proposition, and by feeling so many eyes turned on her, did not immediately make any answer; then a vexatious remembrance intruded itself, and she replied, with what that individual would have thought most unnecessary concern,—

"I am very sorry—I mean—I believe I am half-engaged to Mr. Vavasour."

"I should think you were," said Mrs.

Rolleston. "I don't know what he would say if you threw him over."

"Oh!" said Bertie, plaintively, "if that insinuating youth has been beforehand, of course there's no chance for me. Well, I am out of the hunt,"—and he carelessly whistled a bar of 'Not for Joseph' in reply to a suggestive motion of his sister's towards Miss Kendal.

"I should think it so dull," said that young lady, tossing her head, "to be engaged so long before. *I* do not intend to decide till the day."

"What! shall you keep all your admirers in suspense till the last moment?" said Bertie, with a covert sneer, for he was angry at her slighting behaviour to Bluebell. "What a scramble there will be!"

Miss Kendal was not altogether satisfied with the tone of the remark, so she commenced tying on her cloud, observing

sharply;—"Well, mamma, we shall be benighted if we stay any longer."

Bertie dutifully attended them to the sleigh, and won the elder lady's heart by the skill with which he tucked round her the fur robes and the parting grace of his bow.

She was about to purr out some commendation, when—"What a bear that man is!" burst with startling vehemence from Miss Kendal's coral lips.

"Oh! my dear, what can you mean? I thought he seemed so agreeable."

"I as good as told him," muttered the ruffled fair, too angry to be reticent, "that I had no one to drive me to-morrow; and I think it was real rude asking that Bluebell Leigh before my face,—a mere nursery governess—and not giving me so much as the chance of refusing him."

"But you said," urged Mrs. Kendal,

who did not see beyond the proverbial nasal tip, "that you would not decide on your sleigh till the day."

"I only know," said the daughter, with dark emphasis, "I wouldn't drive with him now, if he went on his bended knees to ask me."

"Thank you, Bella," said Bertie, returning. "Nice little game you had cut out for me! What an odious girl!"

Cecil's jealous instinct detected the root of this animosity, more especially guided thereto by his attempt to secure Bluebell as a companion, which had surprised her not too agreeably.

"What is her crime," said she, sarcastically, "beyond a rather transparent design of driving with you, Bertie?"

"She is hung with bangles like an Indian squaw, and has a Yankee twang in her voice."

"She pretended to scarcely remember me," said Bluebell, "though we were at school together."

"Jealous, I dare say," laughed Bertie. "Is she an admirer of Jack Vava-sour's?"

"Fancy any one admiring a boy like that!" said Bluebell, who did not feel in charity with her allotted charioteer.

Bertie had advanced to take her cup, and, as she said this, it seemed to Cecil he touched her hand caressingly under cover of it.

"I dare say," said she, sharply, "Alice Kendal has as many admirers as other people, and, perhaps, can dispense with counting Captain Du Meresq among them."

Bluebell looked up, astonished at her manner; but Bertie perceived it with more intelligence, and the thought, "What a

bore it will be if she is jealous," afterwards passed through his mind,—by which may be inferred he had had in contemplation the acquisition of "Heaven's last best gift."





CHAPTER VII.

THE GARRISON SLEIGH CLUB.

'T were a pity when flowers around us rise,
To make light of the rest, if the rose be not there;
And the world is so rich in resplendent eyes,
'T were a pity to limit one's love to a pair.

MOORE.

"I NEVER saw a prettier sight in my life," cried Cecil, as she stood with a motley group in the verandah of "The Maples," the rendezvous of the sleighing party. As each sleigh turned in at the gate and deposited its freight, it fell into rank which extended all round the lawn, till scarcely a space was left on the drive that encircled it, and the air rang with the bells on the nodding horses' heads.

“What the—blazes!” ejaculated Bertie, as Mr. Vavasour rounded the corner at a trot in a red-wheeled tandem, scarlet plumes on the horses, and the robes a combination of black bear-skins and scarlet trimming. The leader, a recent importation from England, better acquainted with the hunting-field than the traces, reared straight on end; but a judicious flick on her ear sent her with a bound almost into the next sleigh, and the tandem drew up at the hall door to an inch.

“Post? mail-cart? nonsense!” said Jack, shaking hands all round mid an avalanche of chaff. “Nice cheerful colour for a cold day; that’s all.”

“Quite scorching,” said Major Fane. “Well, Miss Rolleston, if they leave us behind at the turnpikes, we shall never lose sight of them with Jack’s flames for a beacon.”

"How do you like your tandem, Bluebell?" asked Cecil, "and how far do you expect to get before Mr. Vavasour upsets you?" added she, *sotto voce*.

"I don't care if he chooses a good place," laughed Bluebell.

"Why, I thought Bertie wasn't going," said Mrs. Rolleston, as that individual drove up in a modest cutter with a gentleman companion.

"I think he changed his mind when he heard Miss Kendal was going with papa," said Cecil.

"I believe we are all here," said Colonel Rolleston, who was to lead the procession, coming out with the great lady of the party, an eccentric dowager peeress, who having "tired her wing" with flying through the States, was now perching awhile before re-crossing the Herring-pond. Miss Kendal and a subaltern,

pressed into the service, placed themselves in the back seat, well smothered in wolf-skins, and the first sleigh moved off to the admiration of the school-room party at the window, who, with the partiality of childhood, thought their papa's the most beautiful turn-out in the city.

"Mr. Vavasour's horse is up the bank," screamed Fleda. "How much better papa drives; he went off so quickly and quietly. I wouldn't be Bluebell! Mr. Vavasour can hardly get out at the gate."

"If papa had to drive one horse before another, perhaps he couldn't either," said Lola, who had been watching with great interest the erratic course of Jack's leader.

Twenty sleighs were off in a string, the crowd cheering them to the echo as they dashed through the Queen's Park; but on gaining Carleton Street they were obliged

carefully to keep the track, as the sides of the road were deep and treacherous.

“The Colonel is making the pace very slow,” remarked Mr. Vavasour; “like to drive, Miss Leigh? they are going very smoothly.”

Bluebell, whose knowledge of horses was about equal to her opportunities of instruction, unhesitatingly assented. Jack’s gratification thereat was somewhat tempered, when he saw the bewilderment apparent in his flighty pair at the very original manner in which she handled her “lines.”

“I suppose,” said that young lady, with the composure of ignorance, “we are all right as long as this bald-faced horse keeps its nose pointing at Captain Delamere’s back.”

“Quite so,” said Jack, cheerily; “don’t take the whip, you are only winding it

round your own neck. "I'll give Dahlia a lick in the face if she turns out of the rank."

They were winding down a hill, and took a road at the bottom right angles to it. Colonel Rolleston, in the first sleigh, was blandly pointing out to Lady Hampshire the *coup d'œil* of the whole procession as they described two sides of a triangle.

"Do you like my plumes?" asked Jack, relaxing his surveillance on Dahlia, as her left ear, which had been laid back in a suggestive manner, resumed its accustomed position.

"Like them," echoed Bluebell; "it's just like a hearse, bar the colour, which is frightful. I wouldn't have come if I had known I was to be driven in such a fire-engine."

"There now," rather crest-fallen. "I chose them because you said you were

fond of scarlet, otherwise I should have preferred blue, except that I might have been taken for one of the 10th, who mount their regimental colours on everything."

"I like the 10th," said Bluebell, perversely; "they are all good-looking except the Adjutant, who got his nose sliced off by a Sikh, and the . . . goodness what's that?" as a fearful shout, followed by a sudden checking of horses, brought the whole line to a stand-still.

"What's the matter?" was passed from one sleigh to another up to the front: the return message, shouted and taken up as each one interpreted it, became soon about as intelligible as it does in the game of Russian scandal, and for the next few minutes everybody was conjecturing at once.

"Here's Du Meresq," cried Jack, as Bertie came ploughing through the snow.

"Halloa, guard! what's wrong on the line?"

"Run into a goods' train," said he, keeping on his course to the Vice-President's sleigh.

"Du Meresq never tells one anything," said Jack; "I hate a mysterious fellow; somebody's capsized, I suppose, and he's gone for some brandy."

"Perhaps for a shovel," suggested Bluebell. "Colonel Rolleston may have come to a drift."

"Don't see how we are to reverse our engine," replied Jack, looking each side of the road, where the snow was piled four or five feet.

Bertie, however, had not gone for a shovel, which would have been perfectly useless, but to explain the situation and assist in turning round the sleighs. In front of Colonel Rolleston was a huge

rampart of snow, extending for some distance. The wind setting dead in that direction, had drifted it across, and buried the track several feet. This road had been clear the day before, for Bertie and Cecil had driven it to ascertain, but the wind had changed and snow fallen during the night.

Major Fane's sleigh was successfully turned, after a great deal of assistance to the horses, who floundered up to their shoulders; and to this haven of refuge Du Meresq was conducting several young ladies, for each sleigh having to turn on the spot where their progress was arrested, a certain number of upsets was inevitable.

"Come, Miss Leigh," said a voice beneath her, "you musn't stick to the ship any longer. Why, this is the worst bit of all. You can't jump; trust to me." And to Jack's indignation, Bertie lifted her

from the wheel and carried her through some deep snow to a dry place. There was a certain amount of excuse for it, as he couldn't have deposited her in the drift, and turning the tandem took up its owner's whole attention, and the services of three or four volunteers; but he fancied Du Meresq had squeezed the little hand before he relinquished it, and ere the tell-tale blush had passed from Bluebell's face, Jack had turned, jumped out and replaced her in the tandem with quiet decision.

Bluebell, confused by the powerless way she had been handed about between her two admirers, could not rally directly, and sat meditating an early snubbing for Jack, but a ridiculous incident soon distracted her attention.

"Get out? No, thank you, Captain Du Meresq," cried Lilla Tremaine, a tall,

handsome girl in the sleigh behind; "you'd find me a precious weight to carry, and I am very comfortable where I am. Turn away, Captain Delamere, we'll sink or swim together."

Thus urged, the individual called on made his effort; the sleigh turned, indeed, but on its side, and the adventurous Miss Tremaine, summarily ejected, sank to her waist in the deep snow, her crinoline rising as she descended, spread out under her arms, looking like an inverted umbrella. Jack and Bluebell were suffocating with the laughter they vainly tried to hide, and Bertie, who was on foot, took in the situation at once, and rushed to the rescue.

"Put your arms round my neck, Miss Tremaine," cried he, peremptorily.

The poor girl, half crying with shame and cold, did so, and Du Meresq, grasping

her firmly round the waist, endeavoured to drag her forth.

"It's even betting she pulls him in," cried Jack, in a most unfeeling ecstasy, for Miss Tremaine was no pocket Venus—rather answered the Irishman's description of "an armfull of joy."

"Oh, dear!" said poor Lilla, trembling with cold, as she found herself on *terra firma*, "I never can go on; the snow has made me quite wet through."

"Of course you can't," said Bertie, decidedly; "you'd catch your death of cold. Delamere, you drive on with the other Miss Tremaine," for they had both been in his sleigh, "and I'll take Miss Lilla home in my cutter, where she can get dry clothes. You must all pass their house on your way back, when we can fall in again; so that's all settled. Oh, Meredith, I forgot you. Hitch on to some

other sleigh, there's a good fellow. I am on ambulance duty; somebody tell Colonel Rolleston—presently."

Then Bertie, who had his own reasons for hurrying, placed Miss Tremaine, still shivering from her snow bath, in the cutter, and drove rapidly off.

"Well, I am d—d," muttered Captain Delamere to Vavasour; "she has never seen the fellow before!"

"Hush, pray," said Jack, affectedly; "he is an officious young man. But be thankful for small mercies, old boy; you have got one left."

"That's the wrong one," growled Delamere.

After a brief consultation about the route, a unanimous vote for luncheon was passed, so they drove on till they came to an open space, the contrary side of the wood in which Du Meresq and Bluebell had walked

on Sunday. Here all the sleighs formed up together, and Major Fane's larder was ransacked.

Curaçoa, mulled claret, hot coffee, &c., kept warm in a blanket, were passed round, with mutton pies, croquettes, cakes, and other edibles; and circulation being restored, all was mirth and hilarity.

Colonel Rolleston alone remained dark and moody. He had just discovered the defection of Du Meresq and Lilla, and, having his own opinion of his brother-in-law, disapproved of it entirely. Miss Tremaine also was much too flighty for his taste, and he was very hard on Captain Delamere for not applying to him to get her decorously out of her delicate dilemma.

He made up his mind to curtail the drive, and call at Mr. Tremaine's at his earliest convenience.

Bertie, in the mean time, delighted at

getting a *tête-à-tête* with a handsome girl, instead of driving in a monotonous string with Mr. Meredith, proceeded to improve the occasion with such success that his fair companion forgot her wet stockings, and even omitted to observe that they had passed the turn leading to the paternal abode.

When she did remark it, Bertie easily persuaded her that she must be quite dry now, and that, as they had missed the garrison drive, they had better take one on their own account. Miss Lilla, unrestrained by the detective eyes of her elder sister, was ripe for any frolic, and Bertie certainly did not find so many obstacles in the way of an affectionate flirtation as he had with Bluebell.

But our business is with the trans-Atlantic picnic in the snow, not with the "cutting-out" expedition of this reprobate

pair. Having distributed the remainder of the luncheon to the servants, a start was again effected. Lilla's adventure had left its impression one way or another on two or three of the party. Jack was delighted that Du Meresq was off on a fresh pursuit, and so not likely to be hanging about Bluebell; and that damsel was trying, by a reckless flirtation with Vava-sour, to stifle the vexatious conviction that Bertie had only been making a fool of her on Sunday, and was now probably repeating the same game with Miss Tremaine. Yet at this period her vanity was more wounded than her heart; very different from poor Cecil, whose infatuation was of older date, and not the mere result of a few flattering speeches.

For a girl of her disposition to set her affections on a man like Bertie was certain misery. She had no rivals in those days

when she learnt to care so intensely for the sympathetic companion who understood her so much better than any one else. He understood her; therein was the potent charm; her mind awoke and her ideas vivified from contact with his, as two happily-contrasted colours become brighter in hue in juxtaposition. No companion had ever suited her so perfectly, and yet Bertie had scarcely made direct love to her. It seemed a matter of course that they should care most for each other, and Cecil's young and ardent heart had drifted beyond recall ere she had done more than suspect another side to his character.

Now she perceived that Bertie's affection for her by no means made him insensible to the bright eyes of the fair Canadians; yet the more she cared for his philandering interludes with other girls the less she showed it, except that her manner grew

colder, though, unfortunately; her heart did not.

Major Fane was disappointed with Cecil's pre-occupied mood. He had taken some pains to secure her for this drive, and she hadn't a word to say to him. He certainly admired her, but, perhaps, it was more his horror of Canadian girls that had made her his choice for the day. He always said their only idea of conversation was chaff, and rudeness under cover of it; and as he had been the victim of many such "smart" speeches, he looked upon them with nervous aversion.

The quiet repose of a lady-like English girl gained by the contrast. There was rather too much tranquillity to-day, perhaps; so he exerted some tact to draw Cecil from her reserve, the cause of which he was unable to guess. He agreed with her in reviling the monotony and stupidity of

sleighting picnics, having to follow one by one like a string of geese, long after one was perished with cold, though he failed to detect in her weariness that she was wishing for her father to stop at the Tremaines', and annex the truant sleigh to the rest.

Her discontent somewhat relieved by expression, she became ashamed of her unsociability, and Major Fane's next topic was not uncongenial. He was airing his cherished grudge, and pronouncing a severe philippic on the belles of the Dominion. Cecil was incapable of detraction, or envy of another's greater success; but, in the face of Bertie's abduction of Lilla before her eyes, she did not feel particularly in charity with any daughter of Canada.

In the mean time, Bluebell, in the strangest of spirits, refused to relinquish the reins, even in difficult places, and conducted herself generally with a mixture of

recklessness and ignorance that gave Jack enough to do to look out.

He rather took advantage of this mood to make more decided love than he had hitherto done; but while he thought her wild with fun and spirits, she was really goaded on by vexation and bitterness of heart; and perhaps her most immediate wish was for solitude to drop the mask and be miserable in peace.

That was impossible, at present. Jack was tiresome. He was giving her directions how to steer up a hill, formidable from its narrow track and deep drop on either side. Dahlia, it seemed, jibbed sometimes; she must— Bluebell was paying no attention. Good Heavens! what was happening? — the leader backing and sideling! Jack's stinging whip and clutch at the reins could not arrest the catastrophe. Dahlia rears and falls over

the edge, pulling sleigh and wheeler after her into a trough of snow.

Bluebell, blinded and half-suffocated,—no wonder, for three bear-skins and two cushions were a-top of her (not to mention Jack, who had caught his leg in the reins, and was unable immediately to rise),—made vain efforts to extricate herself; the horses were struggling on their sides; and altogether, as the Americans say, it was rather “mixed.”

Somehow or another, no one ever does get hurt out of a sleigh, even after an *impromptu* header of a dozen feet. Ten minutes later the party was *en route* again, Bluebell transferred, *en pénitence*, to Colonel Rolleston’s sleigh, *vice* the subaltern; and by this time nearly every one was discontented and anxious to return.



CHAPTER VIII.

FIXING UP A PRANCE.

'Tis over,
The valse, the quadrille, and the song,
The whispered farewell of the lover ;
The heartless adieu of the throng,
The heart that was throbbing with pleasure ;
The eyelid that longed for repose,
The beaux that were dreaming of treasure,
The girls that were dreaming of beaux.

— EDWARD FITZGERALD.

BEFORE they got to the Tremaines' house, Bertie drove up with Miss Lilla, who was "quite dry now, thank you ; not worth while bringing all the sleighs up to the door." More than one curious observer noticed the panting flanks of the horse, who scarcely looked as if he had been resting in a stable. To be sure, the de-

linquents *had* done that last mile rather fast, to nick in and meet the party before they should make inconvenient inquiries at Mr. Tremaine's,—Bertie, who was as good a mimic as his mother, enhancing the fright of his fair companion by an improvisation of the scene that would probably take place supposing they were too late to prevent it, and further convulsing her with a travesty of his brother-in-law in his most imposing attitude of stately displeasure.

Lilla nearly had a relapse when they met the rest, as Colonel Rolleston's face was the faithful reproduction of Bertie's five minutes before; but the ironical silence with which he received her speech, rather diminished their triumph at having escaped detection. The girls were all to return to "The Maples," dress there, and go to the dinner and dance at the barracks, under Mrs. Rolleston's sole chaperonage.

The scrambling toilette was got through with much noise and merriment.

"Oh, has any one seen my 'waist'?" and "Do smooth my waterfall," were enigmatical exclamations of frequent occurrence. Cecil's dormitory resembled a milliner's show-room from the variety of dresses spread on the bed.

These were not of a very extravagant description; papery pink or green silk seemed most in vogue, completed with rows of beads round the throat; but when viewed in connexion with the apple-blossom complexions, abundant hair, and dancing eyes of the Canadian belles, the adventitious aids of dress might well be deemed as superfluous as painting the lily.

Half-a-dozen covered sleighs going and returning transported the party to the barracks, where, escorted by their mili-

tary hosts, they ascended the staircase, banked with evergreens, and lined by motionless soldiers, to the ante-room, which, of course, looked as unattractive as the cordial but mistaken exertions of its proprietors could make it—all the *laissez-aller* comfort primly tidied away, and such a roasting fire as speedily drove every one to remote corners of the room.

The *mauvais quart d'heure* before dinner had the usual sobering effect, and young people, who later on would be valseing together on the easiest of terms, now shyly looked over photograph books, and discoursed with an edifying amount of diffidence and respect.

Each one was to go in to dinner with his companion of the sleigh—an arrangement of questionable wisdom, and, as Bertie said, “It behoved one to be doubly careful whom one drove.” Captain Dela-

mere was furious, for, when he claimed Lilla, she calmly replied, "That having taken them both, she of course supposed he would ask her elder sister, and, therefore, had promised Captain Du Meresq."

Before Delamere had done anathematizing his folly in giving the saucy Lilla such a loop-hole to throw him over, the trumpet sounded, folding-doors opened, and fifty people sat down to the cheery repast.

The table was bright with regimental plate, racing cups, and hot-house flowers. The band commenced playing "Selections," somewhat deafening, perhaps, but then it was too cold to put them out of doors.

Cecil and Bluebell were neither of them too much gratified at witnessing the furious flirtation going on at dinner between Captain Du Meresq and Miss Tremaine; but Cecil, who never looked at

them, and therefore, of course, saw everything, fancied the admiration most on the lady's side, and even some of her *acillades*, bravado. To be sure, Bertie never did flirt seriously *en évidence*, if he could help it.

Bluebell, completely out of sorts, was acquiring a painful experience. Du Meresq's conduct seemed inexplicable and provoking as she pondered indignantly on her walk in the Humber, and mentally ejaculated with Miss Squeers, "Is this the hend?"

Jack, temporarily discouraged by her indifference to himself, which came on rather rapidly at dinner, gave his next neighbour the benefit of his conversation.

But this unsatisfactory repast to our heroines was not unnecessarily prolonged, the mess-room having to be cleared for the great business of the evening, which let us hope will prove what it is sure to be

called in next day's discussion, "a very good ball."

Why this undescriptive phrase should be applied to every well-attended dance, with a supper, has always perplexed us; for, of course, every one really judges it by his or her own personal success and enjoyment, not unfrequently incompatible with that of some one else. Yet it is all summed up next morning in the summary verdict, "good," or "bad." If there is a deficiency of gentlemen, space, supper, or *ton*, the latter; but given these indispensables, you may have been jilted for your bosom friend by your latest conquest, yet you must come up smiling, and endorse the public panegyric on the hated evening till the subject be superseded.

Bluebell, a few weeks ago, would have looked upon this ball as the acme of delight. She was in great request, and,

indeed, attained that highest object of young lady ambition, being belle of the evening; but now her happiness did not depend on the many—dance after dance passed, and the only partner she cared for had not once engaged her.

Bertie had been sitting out half the evening with Lilla in a conservatory, and when they did emerge, was seized on by his brother-in-law with very black looks, and introduced to a somewhat unappreciated young lady.

Bertie had the happy knack of appearing equally charmed, whether presented to a beauty or the reverse; but he inscribed himself very low down on her card, remorselessly ignoring the intervening blanks, and then approached Cecil, who, in black and amber, was the most striking-looking girl in the room. Though inferior in beauty to many, her fine figure and

expressive eyes could never pass unnoticed.

"Dear little Cecil, how well she is looking!" thought he, facilely forgetting his latest flame, and just becoming sensible of her "altered eye."

"My niece," said Bertie, in a theatrical tone, intended to disguise his perception of it, "shall we tread a measure? Let me lead you forth into the mazy dance."

"Excuse me, Bertie," said Cecil, languidly; "I am only going to dance the two or three round ones I am engaged for, and I know you do not care for square."

"I should think not," said he, angrily, "when you are going to dance round ones with other fellows."

"You see you asked too late," said she, indifferently.

"Will you go in to supper with me then?"

"That was all arranged and written

down ages ago. Let me see, I am ticketed for the Major again."

"As you have been all day. I never saw such a cut-and-dried, monotonous, programme for a party: all done by rule—no freedom of action."

"Really, Bertie, you and Miss Tremaine can't complain."

"That's why you are so cold to me to-night, Cecil," said Du Meresq, quietly.

"What can it signify to me?" retorted she, freezingly vexed at having permitted the adversary, so to speak, to discover the joint in her harness. Her partner, who had been hovering near, now claimed and bore her unwillingly away, for next to being friends with Bertie was the pleasure of "riling" him by smiling icyness. It was the only weapon she permitted herself, as she would not condescend to any visible sign of jealousy or pique.

Bertie was simply *gênée* by her determination to be all or nothing; there was no satisfying such an unreasonable girl. Like the immortal Lilyvick, "he loved them all," yet her thoughtful mind and gentle companionship were becoming more to him than he was himself aware of.

Cecil, valseing round, looked at each turn for his tall figure leaning against the wall. It was an abstracted attitude, and he seemed graver than usual.

"Had she made him unhappy?"—she trusted so—would give the world to read his thoughts.

Some one said, "There is no punishment equal to a granted prayer." Du Meresq was wrapt in speculation as to whether they had really succeeded in getting a wild turkey for supper, which the Mess President was in maddening doubt about the day before.

That blissful moment was at hand, and the room thinned with a celerity born of *ennui*, I suppose, for very few people are really hungry, yet it is the invariable signal for as simultaneous a rush as of starving paupers when the door of a soup-kitchen is opened. To be sure, there are the chaperones, poor things, round whom no "lovers are sighing," and, perhaps, supper is the liveliest time to them—old gentlemen, too, might be allowed some indulgence; but what can be said for dancing men, wasting the precious moments of their partners, while they linger congregated together among the *débris* and champagne-corks?

"What a clearance," said Bluebell, subsiding, with a fagged air, on to a sofa, as her partner bowed himself off with an eye to business.

"Forward the heavy brigade," said

Bertie, motioning to his brother-in-law bearing off Lady Hampshire; "only room for thirty at a time. *We* must wait, Miss Leigh."

"I am ready to wait. But what have 'we' got to say to it?" said Bluebell, with her Canadian directness.

"Don't speak so unkindly," said Bertie, sentimentally, flinging himself on the sofa by her side. "You don't know all I have suffered this week."

"You certainly disguised it very well," said the girl, with total disbelief in her eyes.

"Do you think I felt nothing when I saw you all day with Vavasour, who every one knows is madly in love with you; and then dancing every dance—not leaving a corner in your programme for me?"

"You didn't ask me," said Bluebell, less austere.

"No, for you never so much as looked my way. Besides, Bluebell, I told you we must be careful. If Colonel Rolleston guessed my feeling for you—he is so selfish, he forgets he has been young himself—I should be no longer welcome here."

"Then, I am sure," said Bluebell, the tears rushing to her eyes, "I wish you had never come. I have been *miserable* ever since I took that stupid walk, which you prevented my mentioning; and—and—"

"Let's be miserable again next Sunday, Bluebell," whispered Bertie.

"I shall not go home; or, if I do, I'll stop there. I'll *never* walk with you again, Captain Du Meresq."

"Quoth the raven, 'never more!'"
I know what it is, you are tired to death. Sit still on the sofa and I will bring

you some supper; sleighing all day and dancing all night have distorted your mental vision,"—and Bertie dashed off, passing the young lady he was engaged to on his way to the supper-room, with an inward conviction that their dance must be about due. Having possessed himself of a modicum of prairie hen, he intercepted a tumbler of champagne cup just being handed across the table to Captain Delamere.

"Confound it, that's mine!" said the aggrieved individual.

"I want it for a lady," urged Bertie.

"So do I," said Delamere.

"My dear fellow," said Bertie, chaffingly, nodding towards a gorgeous American, "it is for Mrs. Commissioner Duloe. She must not be kept waiting."

"I won't allow my lady to be second to any lady in the room," cried Delamere, who was elevated.

Bertie was in too great a hurry to chaff Delamere any longer, for, perceiving that his relatives were safely at supper, he resolved to make the most of the few minutes at his disposal, and, as he would have expressed it, "lay it on thick."

Bluebell was leaning languidly back on the sofa, watching the forms of the dancers, ever revolving past the open door to the strains of a heart-broken valse. (*En passant*, why are the prettiest vales all plaintive and despairing, quadrilles and Lancers cheerful and jiggy, and galops reckless, not to say tipsy?)

Bertie, with his spoils, was by her side, and, having restored her nerves with champagne, proceeded to agitate them again with the warmest protestations of affection. The child, with the day's experience before her, only half-believed him; but the spirit of coquetry woke up,

and she resolved to try and make him care for her as much as he pretended to do.

But Bluebell was trying her 'prentice-hand with a veteran in such warfare.

They were alone in the little room; in one adjoining a few people were sitting.

"I wish that girl would not watch us so," said Bluebell, indicating one apparently deep in a photograph book, under cover of which she was furtively observing them.

"Oh," said Bertie, with a groan, "she's been following me about ever since I asked her for a dance six off. I hope it is over."

"I dare say she's very angry at being left sitting out," said Bluebell. "I am sure I should be."

"Ah!" said Bertie, "your experience will be all the other way,—it's us poor fellows who will be thrown over; besides, she shouldn't have got introduced to me.

I saw her going on the wrong leg and all out of step, and Jack Vavasour says she's a regular stick-in-the-mud to talk to."

A stream now issued from the supper-room, and Mr. Vavasour, bowing himself free from a "comfortable" looking matron, hurried up.

"Our dance, Miss Leigh; I thought I should never be in time. She was twenty minutes at the chicken and lobster-salad, and then went in for sweets."

"I must go and give my girl a turn, I suppose," whispered Bertie. "She's guarding the outposts, so no chance of giving her the slip. She'd go raging off to the Colonel. Just like him, letting one in for such a real bad thing!"

A few sleighs were beginning to jingle up, but most of the girls assumed moccasins, clouds, and furs; and kilting their petticoats as deftly and mysteriously as only

Canadians can, set out in parties, escorted by their partners, and stepped briskly over the moon-lit snow to their respective dwellings.

Bertie saw his party off in their sleigh, tenderly squeezing Bluebell's hand, who fell to his share, but did not return with them. Indeed, he was soon walking in quite an opposite direction, by the side of a shrouded figure in a rose-coloured cloud, out of which laughed the mischievous eyes of the second Miss Tremaine.





CHAPTER IX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

Trifles, light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ.

SHAKESPEARE.

BLUEBELL had not visited her mother for three weeks. One Saturday Freddy had a sore throat and would not let her out of his sight, keeping up an incessant demand for black-currant jelly and fairy tales, and the next week a heavy fall of snow made walking impossible. She now very often shared the gaieties of the others. Mrs. Rolleston took great interest in Bluebell's career. She thought it by no means improbable that Sir Timothy should have provided for her in his will, or, indeed,

that he might any day acknowledge her; and though she took her out, and let her dance to her heart's content, kept faithful watch to prevent any undesirable flirtation.

So the kind-hearted lady was a good deal disturbed at seeing Jack Vavasour, who came of an extravagant and far from wealthy family, first in the field. After the manner of love-lorn subalterns, he haunted and persecuted the fair object of his affections, who cared nothing about him, and treated him as a child does its toys, sometimes pleased with them, and at others casting them indifferently aside.

And all the time Bertie was gaining greater influence over her. But even Cecil, whose eyes were keen, was never able to detect any evidence of a secret understanding between them.

He regularly asked her for one valse only when they went to balls; indeed, he

could not do less. Cecil, of course, could not hear what they talked about *then*.

There is a dreamy, intoxicating valse of Gung'l's, which he always made her keep for him when it was played. It was a small piece of selfish romance, for well he knew that charmed air would ever hereafter be haunted with associations of him. How many more "stolen sweet moments" he found in the day must be left to the reader's imagination. But stolen they were; for Du Meresq knew Cecil's disposition, and was far from wishing to break with her, though "why should he spare this little girl with the chestnut hair, and the love in her deep-blue eyes?" And Bluebell no longer shrank from being underhand. It did not strike her in that light now. She thought of nothing but Bertie, who was so different before the others, that she learnt to look forward

to their brief chances of being alone as much as he did. And Du Meresq, with ingenious sophistry, expatiated on the charm of keeping their delicious secret to themselves, uncommented on by the cold and unsympathetic.

Thus Bluebell, from being a lively, ingenuous, outspoken child, altered into a dreamy maiden, living a hidden life of repressed excitement, whose whole interest was the fugitive, uncertain interviews with Bertie, and an interchanged glance, touch of the hand, or few fond words, ventured on when the others were not attending.

"Bluebell," laughed Cecil, as a cutter drove to the door, "here is your Lubin again." The girls had just returned from the Rink, and were disrobing upstairs.

"Oh, he is so tiresome," said the other.
"I declare I won't come down."

"That you must; we should never get

rid of him ; he would sit on waiting for you. . You have made such a goose of him, Bluebell, and he used to be such fun."

"I shouldn't mind him if he was fun now ; but he just sits glowering at one, and stays so long. . Why can't a person see when he is not wanted ?"

"But you do want him sometimes," said Cecil. "You are always 'off' and 'on' with poor Jack. I believe, if he proposed, you would say 'No' one day and retract the next."

They entered the drawing-room, where was young Vavasour, as usual, making conversation to Mrs. Rolleston, who was at once bored and disapproving. Cecil shook hands pleasantly enough, but Bluebell, not even looking at him, extended a lifeless hand in passing, and, picking up some work, appeared absorbed in counting stitches.

Jack turned over in his own mind every possible cause of offence. He couldn't perceive that it was he himself that was not wanted, and that she cared not a button for anything he had done or left undone.

He talked on perseveringly with the others, glancing stealthily at Bluebell tattling, till Cecil got up to make tea, when he moved to a seat nearer.

"I wasn't out of uniform till four o'clock, Miss Leigh, or I should have been at the Rink."

"So I suppose. You always go there, don't you?"

"When I expect to meet any one," trying to throw a sentimental look in his generally laughing brown eyes.

"It isn't usually empty; but, of course, you don't go for the skating. You'll never make anything of that."

"Any more than you will of driving," retorted Jack. "Shall you ever forget that crumpler down the bank? Dahlia hasn't recovered the fright yet."

"Stupid thing; what did she jump over for? I was nearly suffocated. I am sure there must have been a cast of me on the snow."

"It wasn't altogether unpleasant," said Jack. "We were covered up very snug and warm, like babes in the wood. I shouldn't mind doing it again in the same company."

"Shouldn't you?" said Bluebell, indignantly. "Then you may omit the company." And so they went on whispering, to Mrs. Rolleston's annoyance, till the Colonel's voice was heard bringing in a visitor—a lady of unfashionable appearance, chiefly remarkable for the variety of knitted articles,

described in work-books as "winter comforts," displayed on her person.

"*Ma tante!*" ejaculated Jack, incautiously; "who is this old Quiz?"

"Here is Mrs. Leigh," said Colonel Rolleston, "who says she has not seen her daughter for three weeks. Where are you, Bluebell?"

Jack felt ready to sink into the earth, while his boyish face became the colour of a peony; and Bluebell, vexed and hurt, advanced to the maternal embrace.

Their mutual confusion was so evident, that the Colonel put another interpretation on it, and remarked, in a tone the reverse of congratulatory,—“You have not been long getting out of harness, Vavasour.”

Jack muttered something, and tried to catch Bluebell's eye, agonies of contrition in his own.

"Well, my dear, and how well you are

looking," said Mrs. Leigh. "But we have missed you at home, Aunt Jane and I. No, thank you, Mrs. Rolleston; not at all tired. I caught the street-car at the corner, which brought me all the way for five cents. Very respectable people in it: only one soldier; he was not at all tipsy. I don't think your men ever are, Colonel. Thank you, Miss Rolleston," as Cecil brought her some tea. "I'll just unbutton my Sontag, or I shan't feel the good of it when I go out again, shall I?"

"I have been thinking," said Mrs. Rolleston, to whom it had just occurred that this would be a good break in Jack's attentions, "that it would be very nice if Bluebell went home for a few days, as you have seen so little of her."

"I'm sure I'm most grateful," said the little lady. "There, my dear, Aunt Jane was saying only yesterday how dull it

was without the child. But are you sure she can be spared, Mrs. Rolleston?"

"Only to you," said the lady, kindly, but smiling a little, for certainly her *duties* were not very onerous.

Bluebell, an anxious listener, felt her heart sink at this proposal. What, go away and leave Bertie, whose daily presence had become a necessity to her! Besides, dreadful thought! his leave might be over ere she returned. In desperation she said, imploringly, "Mamma will not want me for more than a day or two," and gazed anxiously at Mrs. Rolleston, with a world of unspoken entreaty in her eyes.

The appeal was injudicious, only confirming her impression that it was a separation from Jack Bluebell dreaded, and she mentally put on another week to her banishment.

"There's no hurry," said the lady, decidedly; "a change will do you good. She shall walk over to-morrow, Mrs. Leigh; and I am very glad I thought of it."

Bluebell, thinking all was lost, tried not to show her dismay, which would have grieved her mother and done no good; but she remembered, with a sinking heart, that Du Meresq was to dine out that night, and she might get no opportunity of speaking to him alone before changing her quarters.

"I must be off home," said Mrs. Leigh. "Several little things to be done in your room, Bluebell. The stove-pipe has got choked at the elbow, and I must have the sweep in."

Her daughter longed to suggest that it might be more convenient to postpone her appearance for a day; but as Mrs.

Rolleston said nothing, she could not either.

Jack, who had been all this time writhing with vexation at his *mal à propos* remark, here saw a chance of propitiating Bluebell and putting himself on visiting terms at her home.

"My cutter is at the door," said he, addressing Mrs. Rolleston. "If Mrs. Leigh will allow me, I shall be too happy to drive her home."

"Oh, he must be going to propose," thought the former lady, "and they won't have twopence between them;" but she could only reply,—

"Well, Mrs. Leigh, what do you say? Will you trust yourself to Mr. Vavasour?"

"I'm sure," said the little lady, flutteringly, "the gentleman is most kind; but I am so timid with horses unless they are quite old. Does your horse kick, sir?"

"Only if the rein gets under her tail."

"Ah, I should be sure to scream and snatch it—the reins, I mean, and they say that isn't safe driving. I had better walk; and yet it is getting dark, and I shall miss the car. What *shall* I do, Colonel Rolleston?"

"Drive, to be sure," said he, who wanted to get rid of them both. "Vavasour only upsets when he gives the reins to young ladies," with a glance at Bluebell.

"Well, I *should* like a ride in a sleigh, if my poor nerves will let me enjoy it," toddling to the door with Colonel Rolleston.

"I'll take the greatest care of you, Mrs. Leigh," said Jack, heartily, grateful for a re-assuring nod from Bluebell in recognition of his contrite gallantry. The mare, tired of waiting, became fidgetty to be off.

"Oh, he is going to prance. Have you got good hold of his head, sir?" to the groom.

"Quite correct, 'm," grinned that official. "Quiet, 'Nancy,'" that being the stable version of "Banshee."

"Let her go," said Jack, who had just tucked Mrs. Leigh in. A couple of bounds, a smothered scream, and they disappeared in the evening gloom.

"That there old party ain't the guvener's usual form," meditated the bât-man, as he walked back, for the cutter only carried two. "He seems to set a deal of store by her, though. There's some young 'ooman at home, where she lives, I'd take my dying dick."

Cecil and her father, who had seen them off, stopped laughing together at Mrs. Leigh's peculiarities; and Bluebell, finding herself alone with Mrs. Rolleston,

felt impelled to try if she could not curtail her sentence of banishment. Of course, her words were intended to conceal her thoughts — love's first lesson is always hypocrisy.

"I know I am not very much use here," she began, "but still I shouldn't like to think I was of none, and, therefore, I really don't want to stay away more than a day or two."

A sudden look of penetration came into Mrs. Rolleston's face, and, with more sarcasm in her voice than Bluebell's little speech appeared to justify, she said,—

"My dear, scrupulous child, we *can* get on without you longer than that, so you may, with a clear conscience, think of your mother, who is dull this dreadful weather."

Bluebell felt caught in a mesh and incapable of extricating herself, but she

made no attempt to conceal her reluctance to going.

"How long must I stay away?" said she, dolefully.

"Just till the days get a little longer—a fortnight or three weeks, perhaps."

Bluebell made a gesture of despair (Bertie would be gone to a certainty by then), and looked the picture of misery. Mrs. Rolleston's suspicions were now conviction.

"My dear Bluebell," she began, impulsively, "I know there's some reason for your dislike to going," and she gazed fixedly at her. No denial. Bluebell hoped Mrs. Rolleston *had* some inkling of how things were with her and Bertie, and had she then persisted might easily have forced her confidence; which would have considerably enlightened and dismayed the

elder lady, whose mind, being full of Jack, had never dreamed of Bertie.

Mrs. Rolleston, however, rapidly decided it would never do to encourage her to talk of the matter, and that she had better put her foot on it at once.

"I have guessed your little *penchant*, dear, for some one we won't talk about; for indeed, Bluebell, it never can come to anything; you are both too young and too poor. It would be a most undesirable connexion."

"She doesn't think me grand enough for her brother," suggested Bluebell's wounded pride.

"And, therefore," pursued her Mentor, "absence is the best thing in these cases; and when you come back I trust you will have got rid of such hopeless fancies."

Bluebell was deeply mortified, — she

lost all expectation of sympathy, and with a touch of pride, said, — “You must know best, Mrs. Rolleston, but I shall never care for any one else; and I must tell you honestly, *I* can’t give it up if he doesn’t!”

“You will not see him at home?” said the elder lady, hastily. Such a gleam of hope irradiated Bluebell’s face; she had never thought of that.

“Dear me, this is too bad!” continued the other, quite disheartened. “I shall take care you have no more opportunities of meeting here. Bluebell, do be warned. I only speak for your good.”

“How self-interest deceives one,” moralized the girl; “it is only because I am, as she says, ‘a most undesirable connexion for her brother!’”

Cecil entered at this juncture, and Bluebell, hearing the Colonel’s step also

approaching, made a hasty escape from the room.

"What is the matter with her?" asked Cecil. "She brushed by me so suddenly, and looked so strange."

"Nearly knocked me over," said the Colonel, who had caught the last words.

"Don't notice it; I am afraid Bluebell has lost her heart to young Vavasour; and she is miserable at going home, because she thinks she will not see him."

"I am delighted you have put a stop to that folly," said the Colonel; "that boy dawdles over here every afternoon. I can't have Miss Bluebell's 'followers' everlastingly caterwauling in my house."

An expression of extreme astonishment came over Cecil's face.

"Bluebell doesn't care *in the least* for Jack Vavasour," said she.

"You are evidently not in her con-

fidence. She told me 'she should never care for any one else'—her very words, the little goose."

Cecil seemed lost in perplexity. "And she doesn't want to go home?" asked she, in a bewildered manner.

"Crying her eyes out at this moment, I dare say."

"Then for goodness' sake let her go home, and stay there till she is better," said the Colonel, irritably. "A love-lorn young lady perpetually before me I cannot and will not endure."

His daughter's brow was knitted with thought. Bluebell was evidently in distress at going, but that it had any reference to Jack she totally disbelieved: a latent suspicion revived, and her face grew pained and hard. It was near dinner-time, but, instead of going up to dress, she turned into a little smoking-room, to ponder it

out. What motive could Bluebell have had to avow a perfectly fictitious love affair with Vavasour, unless it was to throw dust in Mrs. Rolleston's eyes and blind her to, perhaps, some under-hand flirtation with Bertie? Cecil's affection for her friend received a severe wrench directly she admitted such a possibility; and then, as she meditated, two or three incidents, too slight to be noticed at the time, rose up to confirm it.

"Forewarned, forearmed, if that is your game, Miss Bluebell," thought she, resolving for the future to watch narrowly. At this moment Du Meresq, whistling 'Ah, che la morte,' burst into the room.

"Cecil here, all in the dark? Light a candle, there's a good girl; I want my cigar case; I'm awfully late."

"Who is the Leonore you are whistling *addio* to?" said she, complying.

"I don't know, the air is running in my head."

"I thought it might be Bluebell; she is going to-morrow."

The match went out, so she could not see the expression of Bertie's face.

"How do you mean?" said he, quietly.

"They think Lubin destructive to her peace of mind, so she is to go home for a fortnight. Singular idea, isn't it?"

"Bosh!" said Du Meresq, emphatically.

"Well, I am off. Good-night, Cecil."





CHAPTER X.

TO-BOGGINING.

We are in love's land to-day,
Where shall we go ?
Love, shall we start or stay ?
Or sail—or row ?

SWINBUENE.

BLUEBELL thought that now Mrs. Rolleston had detected her secret, there was no necessity to keep it from Cecil. They were in the habit of sitting awhile, talking over their bed-room fire at night; and, though, of late, they had scarcely been so intimate, the practice had not been discontinued. So that evening she resolved to approach the subject with Cecil. No doubt she would stand her friend, and be, as ever, generous and sympathetic.

But, at the first outset, no icicle could be brighter and colder than Miss Rolleston's manner, who kept her communication at arm's-length, as it were, and refused to see any hardship in paying a filial visit for a week or two.

"My dear Bluebell, you are really too childish. One would think it was to be an eternal separation."

"It is evident you will not miss me much," said poor Bluebell, wounded, and thankful she had not committed herself further.

"I should if Bertie were not here," answered Cecil, with heartless intention.

"But I really think this is the best time for you to be away, for I am out so much with him, I see nothing of you. When he is gone, Bluebell, and you have returned, we must begin to sing and read together, as we used to do." This agree-

able speech effectually quenched all revelations on Bluebell's side, who, hurt and offended, took up a candle, and retired to her inner apartment.

"They are all alike," she thought; "and Bertie understood the matter better than I did. Now, I suppose, they will try and prevent my ever seeing him again. Girls in novels think it necessary to give up their lovers if the family disapprove; the book always gets very dull then; but Bertie has never yet given me the chance to act the high-minded heroine." And then she fell to wondering why he had not said something really definite, he seemed near it so often. And yet he was his own master; no stern father loomed in the background—*that* Bluebell would have considered a possible obstacle,—for had she not seen such malign influence destroy more than one promising love affair among her com-

panions. Of course there was no solution to such an inscrutable mystery, though Bluebell tossed awake half the night in the effort to find one.

Next morning they all met at breakfast as usual. No allusion was made to her approaching departure. Afterwards, she attended to Freddy's nominal lessons, packed her slender wardrobe, and then remained in her own room, for the first time unwilling to go downstairs without an invitation. And yet she grudged every hour that passed and brought the separation nearer. She heard Bertie whistling about the house, so she would most likely see him before starting—probably only at luncheon, though, which was the children's dinner. A minute before the bell rang Bluebell descended, and came full on Du Meresq in an angle of the staircase. She stopped involuntarily. He was beside her with a smothered

exclamation of endearment, and an eager hand seeking hers. Had she dreamt it? The face was impassive, the hand dropped, and a careless voice was saying,—

“Are you really going home this afternoon, Miss Leigh?”

At the same instant she observed Cecil's upturned eyes in the hall below them. So she had the felicity of eating a cutlet in the presence of her love, but received no aliment for her heart-hunger. Du Meresq was teasing his nieces, and did not add much to the general conversation; but the others made up for it, and, when they addressed Bluebell, did so in a particularly cheery tone, as to a nervous, fanciful girl, not to be encouraged or noticed in her blue fits. She had thought of walking home late in the afternoon, still hoping that something might bring about some last words with Du Meresq, or that

he might even contrive to join her on the road; but Mrs. Rolleston, in the tone of one proposing a pleasure, said she would drive her back herself, and that the sleigh was ordered in half-an-hour.

Bluebell, goaded to mild exasperation, glanced hastily to where Bertie had been sitting, but he had left the room unperceived.

The sleigh was at the door, so also was Captain Du Meresq, smoking an after-luncheon cigar. I grieve to say my heroine displayed not a particle of self-respect as, pale and dejected, she seated herself by Mrs. Rolleston. Indeed, the blue eyes were beginning to swim, when they were dried by a flash of indignation at the parting words of Du Meresq. He merely raised his hat, without attempting to shake hands, and said, in a jesting tone,—“*Au revoir*, Miss Bluebell. I hope you will be a comfort to your mamma.”

As the jingle of the bells died away in the distance, Cecil felt a load removed from her heart. Bluebell had become an object of uncomfortable surmises, and her absence was an inexpressible relief.

She had a fair field now, and Bertie all to herself, and did not intend to spoil the present with tormenting suspicions of the past.

“Probably he *may* have flattered Bluebell at odd times, and turned her head; but Bertie, though he will talk nonsense to anybody who will listen to him, cares for something more than a pretty face. He will forget her directly she is out of sight, for there really is nothing in her.”

Thus severely did Cecil reflect on the friend she had been the means of bringing into the house, and had loved all the more for the kindnesses she had been able to show her. But, then, who could have fore-

seen that the *protégée* would turn into a rival?

Her meditations were interrupted by the chief subject of them.

"What do you intend doing, Cecil, this afternoon?"

"It is very unsettling, people going away," said she, serenely. No occasion to let him see the satisfaction it gave her. "Shall we go and skate at the Rink, presently?"

"Oh, ain't you sick of that place? Let us order your cutter, and look in on the Armstrong's to-boggining party."

"Enchanting!" said Cecil, brightening. "But, dear me! it will be nearly over."

"Not if you look sharp. Wings will take us there in half-an-hour; it isn't five miles to the hill. Don't forget to leave your crinoline behind."

Du Meresq rang the bell, and Cecil

a bear's head and claws on the white ground. Both robes and bells were mounted in scarlet and white; and the masks of two owls occupied the place of rosettes on "Wings" head-stall.

"Well," said Bertie, "we are, luckily, not in Hyde Park; and I suppose a sleigh can't be too bizarre. Is this the creation of your festive fancy, Cecil?"

"Yes; I don't disown it. I sent a coloured sketch of what I wanted to Gaines, and he found fur and everything. 'Wings' was bought in an auction last month. He went cheap, because they never could teach him the correct 'rack-ing' action. Papa advised me to have him, as he thought he would carry me in the summer, and I have no other horse."

"I'll tell you what, Cecil; we must extend our Wings if we are to be in time.

Canter him across the common; there's a capital track."

"Can't he go!" said she, exultingly, as on a hard, frozen surface they sped along. "We rush through the air so silently that if it were not for the bells one might fancy oneself flying."

"Yes," said Bertie; "I have known more unpleasant sensations than being driven ten miles an hour by a fair lady—a dark one, I should say."

"Given the lady, I don't think you much care whom it may chance to be, Bertie."

"If a woman is pretty, to me it's no matter

Be she blonde or brunette, so she let me look at her'

Were you thinking of those lines in
'Lucille'?"

"Them's your sentiments to a T, I should say."

"And you ought to have lived in the

days when the knight had 'Une seule' embroidered on his banner. I'll never believe that his loves were so limited; doubtless each appropriated the invidious distinction to herself."

"I know one knight," said Cecil, "who would give them plenty of reason to do so."

"Fancy," continued Bertie, "riding in full armour to a cross-road, and challenging every one to single combat who declined to acknowledge his particular fair to be queen of love and beauty, and that no one else could hold a candle to her! Now we should think it great impertinence in a fellow to offer his opinion about her at all."

"No," laughed Cecil, "such public proclamation would never suit these inconstant days."

"Can you not believe yourself 'Une

seule,' Cecil, even in these days?" returned he, meaningly and tenderly.

"That would depend on my knight," said she, blushing, and uncertain how to take it. "I should not care to live in a Fool's Paradise."

"If it were Paradise, why analyze the wisdom of it?" said Bertie, gazing with surprised admiration at her radiant face, that kindled as with some hidden fire.

"I could do without him," answered she; "but if he were worth caring for I wouldn't share him with any one."

"I hope Fane isn't 'Un seul,' Cecil. For a young lady with such severe ideas of constancy, you were pretty thick at the sleighing-party."

There was something in this speech that annoyed Cecil, who turned it off with a short answer. It might have been that

she did not like his so composedly contemplating such a possibility.

Du Meresq said no more, perhaps because they were approaching the to-boggin hill, or perhaps, like Dr. Johnson, he had nothing ready.

Cecil was sorry they were so near. She felt more interested in the conversation than in the party, and gazed wistfully down a by-road that would have led them in an opposite direction.

"I wish I dare turn sharp off," thought she. "But, no! we are conventional beings. This idiotic performance is the goal and object of our expedition. I am driving, and must do nothing so indecently eccentric."

So she gave "Wings" a flick with her whip, that sent him up to his bit with his knees in his mouth, and they drew rein on the edge of the snow mountain.

Miss Tremaine's bright face was just on

a level with the top, drawing up her own to-boggin.

"Here's this dear little Lily," said Bertie.

"Your diminutives are curiously applied," said Cecil. "That is a very substantial *petite*."

"How late you are," cried Miss Tremaine, rushing up to them. "Wings," who couldn't bear waiting, began to rear. "Gracious, Cecil, does he feed on yeast-powder to make him 'rise' so? How do you do, Captain Du Meresq? Come along; there's some capital jumps. Here's my little brother will hang on to the horse's head till we find some one else, if you are sure 'Wings' will not soar away with him, like an eagle with a lamb."

"I'd better billet him on that farm," said Du Meresq, driving off.

"And I must go and speak to Mrs. Armstrong," said Cecil.



CHAPTER XI.

EFFECTS OF TO-BOGGINING.

With a slow and noiseless footstep

* * * * *

Takes the vacant chair beside me,

Lays her gentle hand in mine.

LONGFELLOW.

A LITTLE further on, by a blazing fire, was seated the hostess and about a dozen other people on benches and rugs; a table spread with refreshments and hot liquids attracted as many more. The grey sky and white ground threw out the figures solidly, the only patches of colour being the bright petticoats of the ladies as they flashed down or toiled up the snow mountain.

“Have a ‘cock-tail,’ Miss Rolleston?”

said Captain Wilmot, of the Fusiliers. "I have just made a capital one; and then may I steer you down on my to-boggin?"

Cecil accepted both propositions. "But do take mine, for I have never tried it yet."

"What a beauty," said Lilla, enviously. "It doesn't look over strong, though; I shouldn't wonder if it broke in two. You'll have to mind the hole at the bottom; there have been a lot in already."

For the information of the uninitiated, I may as well describe how this hilarious amusement is conducted. Having first selected the highest hill the neighbourhood affords, well covered with slippery frozen snow, two individuals who purpose forming the freight of the to-boggin pose themselves, the foremost holding the reins, which, however, are more for effect than use, sitting between the feet of the

hindmost traveller, who steers with his hands.

As a finger on the snow alters the course of the to-boggin, and a nervous push makes it slue round, scattering the inmates, it is needless to say the tyro in front is admonished to preserve the most absolute immobility. Then the vehicle receives a shove off the top of the hill, and shoots down the smooth precipice, and the novice, with shut eyes to escape the blinding snow that flies like hail-stones about him, listens to the wind whistling behind, and with bated breath—the first time, at any rate—wishes it over.

“Captain Du Meresq,” cried Lilla, “come along; I am going to take you down the big jump.”

“Off Niagara, if you like.”

“It is a tidy drop, the first shelf, so

please I'd rather steer. I never trust my own neck to any one but myself."

Bertie craned over. "Let me go down first, and see what it is like; it will give you an awful shake."

"Bosh! I have been down before; sit tight," said Lilla, adjusting herself.

It was a series of snow terraces, half-natural, half-artificial. The ridge they started from was very steep, and jutting out a little way down, yawned over a perpendicular drop to the next ledge, which sloped off again to ever-recurring but lesser falls.

Receiving the necessary impetus from above, Bertie and Lilla slithered down at a terrific pace, and shot over the jutting ridge—a good twenty feet drop. As they touched the ground, the to-boggin ploughed up the snow, recovered without upsetting, and tore on, jumping down the lesser falls

the same way, and continuing a considerable distance along the level at the bottom before its impetus was exhausted.

Bertie, blind, breathless, and half-choked with snow, heard a voice behind, jerking in quick gasps,—

“Did you e-ver feel such a de-light-ful —sensation in your life before?”

“Never,” said he, with a profound air of conviction, shaking off the snow like a Newfoundland dog. “I wonder if I could have steered as well!”

“If you are going to try, you may take some young woman who is tired of her life,” said Lilla.

“I’ll take myself down, anyhow,” said Du Meresq, rather nettled; and, having dragged her to-boggin up the hill, ran off to get another; but, in passing Cecil, found a moment to say,—“Don’t let that young lunatic delude you down the jump. It is

unfit for any girl but such a glutton as Lilla."

"I haven't the slightest wish to try," said she, laughing. "Lilla's a witch. Just look at her now."

Miss Tremaine, standing poised on her to-boggin, was in the act of gliding down the hill. A light pole held in one hand served as a rudder, the other retained the cord reins.

"It is like a fairy in a pantomime let down from above," ejaculated Du Meresq. "That is uncommonly tall to-boggin-ing!"

A slight commotion was now apparent in the valley below. A brook ran through it, frozen except in one place, where was a large hole. Mr. Tremaine and Captain Delamere, slithering down together, ran into a runaway to-boggin that had upset its occupant. This knocked them out of

their course, and upset them into the rotten ice of the brook.

Mr. Tremaine was precipitated head foremost into the hole, with his heels in the air, and Lilla at the same moment coming to a halt in her acrobatic descent, beheld the apparition of a pair of legs, feet upwards, and a coarse pair of knickerbocker stockings dragged over the boots.

"Who has muffed in now? Gracious goodness, *I* knit those stockings; it is the Governor! Pull him out—quick, quick, Captain Delamere; he'll have a fit!"

That individual, who had just scrambled out, was standing rather dazed, ruefully stanching the cuts on his face. Between them they soon dragged out Mr. Tremaine, half suffocated, and puffing and panting like a demented steam-engine, but by the time he had recovered his breath not much the worse.

The to-boggining was getting fast and furious, and several casualties occurred. The toiler up the hill, too, had need of all his alertness to dodge the numerous erratic cars tearing down in every direction.

An adventurous group were tying a dozen or more to-boggins together, which they called an omnibus; and Jack Vava-sour, in the character of conductor, was holding up his hand, and cadging for passengers.

“Any more for the Brook or Gore Vale? Room for two still in the ‘Lightning’ ’bus! No more?—then we are off. Link arms, ladies and gentlemen;” and the unwieldly apparatus was started. The couplings divided half-way down. About seven reached the bottom, the remaining five upset, and were left there. Cecil was in the latter division, and, having extri-

cated herself from the *débris*, slowly ascended the hill.

She was rather tired now, and slightly bored; and began wondering what had become of her escort. He had not been in the coach, nor was he among the noisy, chattering party approaching her.

"Has any one seen Captain Du Meresq?" asked she.

"Ten minutes ago he was death on the big jump," said Jack. "He took Delamere to start him; and I think Miss Tremaine went too."

A shade passed over Cecil's face. "Would you ask him, Mr. Vavasour, to get the sleigh? It is quite time we were going."

Another quarter of an hour passed, but no signs of Jack or Bertie. Cecil kept up a desultory conversation with Mrs. Armstrong; but a vague impatience and

restlessness came over her. She looked in the direction of the big jump, and it seemed to her a point of attraction that gathered up the stragglers, who all converged towards it. There was quite a crowd there now. Mrs. Armstrong's platitudes became maddening. Then she observed Lilla coming from the same direction, and beckoning. She sprang to meet her.

"Cecil," cried Lilla, "don't be frightened." Why do people always use this agitating formula? "But the fact is poor Bertie has had an awful cropper. Good gracious, Cecil! don't look like that! Are you going to faint? He is not so very much hurt,—stunned a bit at first."

"How was it?" said the other, breathing again, and pressing forward.

"He was going down the drop. Captain Delamere was to push him off, which he

did with a vengeance. He didn't mean any harm, though he don't like a bone in poor Bertie's body. However, the to-boggin snapped in two from the concussion in landing. Bertie was shot out, and rolled to the bottom, which would not have mattered, only he struck his head against some snag or stone hidden by the snow. We looked down, but he didn't seem to move, and we got frightened. I had had nearly enough jumping, but I took Captain Delamere on my to-boggin—didn't trust him to steer, I can tell you, my dear—and bumped down quite safe. Bertie was insensible, with a queer cut on his forehead; so I extracted the solitaire out of his shirt-collar, and Captain Delamere gave him a nip out of his pocket-pistol, and then he seemed to pull himself together and sat up. A lot of people had collected round, and Mr. Vavasour asked

me to come and tell you. Oh, here he is."

"Miss Rolleston," said Jack, "Du Meresq is nearly all right again. But he has twisted his ankle, and can't walk up the hill; so they are going to pull him up on a to-boggin. I'll go and get your sleigh."

"Are you *sure* it is nothing worse?" said Cecil, who could scarcely abandon her first impression that his neck was broken.

"Quite. There he is, to answer for himself," as Bertie and his bearers crested the hill.

She walked to meet them. Du Meresq looked in pain, but cut short all inquiries.

"Wrenched my foot, that's all. You want to go, don't you, Cecil?"

"Oh, yes; as soon as possible. Lilla, Mrs. Armstrong is so far off, will you

make our adieux?" *Sotto voce*, "She is a tiresome old goose; but I left her so abruptly just now."

"Miss Rolleston," whispered Jack, who had just brought up the cutter, "I think I'll send up the doctor from the barracks. Du Meresq did get a baddish cut on the head, and, if he doesn't stay in a day or two, it might turn to erysipelas in this climate."

"Pray do. Oh, Mr. Vavasour! just tell me honestly, is not that sometimes—fatal when it gets to the head?"

Cecil's eyes, dilated with terror, betrayed her to Jack, over whose honest face came an expression of sympathy and intelligence.

"Of course; but we will take care of that. That's why I am sending up the doctor, to prevent him exposing himself out of doors just yet."

Cecil did not find the drive back so agreeable as the previous one. Du Meresq, chafing at the confinement his fast swelling foot would probably entail, and provoked at coming to grief after Lilla's taunt, was in a remarkably bad humour.

Cecil saw the state of the case, and drove on fast, philosophically allowing him to grumble and growl without much concerning herself; but it was almost dark before they drew up at "The Maples."

In the mean time, Colonel Rolleston, having heard from Miss Prosody that his daughter and Du Meresq had gone off to a to-boggining party, chose to be highly scandalized, and poured into the placid ear of his wife a torrent of disapprobation.

In vain did Mrs. Rolleston represent that they were out sleighing and skating together most days without his objecting.

“This was quite different—this was a public party—people would say they were engaged. He never had seen the good of their being so inseparable, but, of course, his opinion on the subject had never been considered,” &c.,—which last remark was rather uncalled for, as few heads of families have their womankind in better order than Colonel Rolleston.

A straw will show which way the wind blows. His wife listened with some uneasiness, for she had always hoped the Colonel tacitly approved the attachment between their respective relatives, which to her appeared so evident. She could only trust this was but a pettish effusion from their prolonged absence, and determined to guard against such causes of offence for the future.

But still they did not come. It was dark—it was dinner-time—it really was

too bad. At last a faint tinkle of sleigh-bells was followed by a slight commotion in the hall. The servant was assisting Bertie into the smoking-room, for he elected to lie on the sofa there, and thus avoid the worry of questions and alarms.

Colonel Rolleston was too grand and angry to evince any curiosity by coming out, and Mrs. Rolleston, after receiving a hasty explanation from Cecil, sent her back to the drawing-room, and took charge of her brother, who was having his boot cut off, and in considerable pain.

There was not much resemblance in character or sympathy between the brothers-in-law; but they had hitherto avoided clashing. Now, however, the Colonel's outraged feelings of propriety wound him up to the determination of administering a solemn rebuke to Du Meresq, and he

stood on that coign of advantage, the hearth-rug, waiting to deliver it.

Cecil came in for the first tide of wrath, somewhat to her surprise; but, dreading her companionship with Bertie being prohibited, exerted considerable tact to smooth her father down, and especially made light of the accident, which she perceived was an aggravation of the offence.

“Not content with making my daughter conspicuous, he hadn’t even the sense to keep out of scrapes himself,” &c.

Mrs. Rolleston glanced interrogatively at Cecil as they met on the stairs. I don’t know what answer her countenance conveyed, but they made simultaneously the same suggestion,—“Let us get Miss Prosody to dine down.” They both knew that without the addition of an unoffending third the subject would be harped on all the evening.

Mrs. Rolleston was an excellent house-keeper; and the well-served repast, aided by the judicious conversation of the ladies, exercised a most soothing influence on the Colonel, who was rapidly attaining that harmless frame of mind in which, as the saying goes, "a child might play with him."

But a sudden ring at the door-bell, followed by the announcement of the surgeon of the regiment, brought on a relapse. What man does not hate being interrupted at dinner? And the doctor's report was sufficiently vague to re-kindle Cecil's fears, and create uncomfortable misgivings in the mind of her step-mother.

Du Meresq, he said, was suffering intense pain in the head, and a small bone in the ankle was broken, which he had set; but he could not be certain there was no internal injury, &c.

Mrs. Rolleston hastened away to Bertie, and did not return; and poor Cecil, not daring to show her anxiety, remained to entertain her father, or rather to listen to his irritable remarks on this unlucky expedition for the rest of the evening.

Never was there a more fractious patient than Du Meresq as he lay listlessly on the sofa while the bone reunited. He had speculated on many a stolen walk with Bluebell in that unfrequented wood, where they would be far less liable to interruption than at "The Maples." He thought of his cavalier parting with her,—a bracing tonic,—necessitated by the self-betrayal of her dejected air, but which he expected to have explained away in a most agreeable manner before now. It would never do to write from this house. What a shame it was sending her away—for a mistake, too, for they

had got the saddle on the wrong horse. "Still," he thought, "it is a bore when girls take things *au grand sérieux*. Lilla Tremaine is quite different, as jolly as possible, but never expects impossibilities. Now Cecil and Bluebell are never satisfied without one's swearing one cares for nobody else. At least, Cecil isn't, though I don't think I ever quite said that to her yet. It doesn't matter telling Bluebell so, and she looks so pleased, and believes every word of it. I would marry that child if I could afford it." And then visions of debt, ever pressing, harassed his mind. "Well, it could not last much longer; there would be something left out of the fire when he sold out, and he could try Australia, or the Gold Coast, or—he didn't care what."

But such subjects were not exhilarating lying alone in the smoking-room, and at

last he rang a hand-bell, and told the servant to ask Miss Rolleston to come and sit with him.

Cecil complied at once, but brought with her a colour-box and sketch-book. Drawing was her great occupation, and she was now filling in from memory a sketch of the to-boggining party.

"You never come near me, Cecil, unless I send for you!" said Du Meresq, complainingly.

"Poor Bertie! are you very much bored?" said she, without looking up from her painting.

"Horribly; and my thoughts and occupations are none of the pleasantest."

"Those horrid duns again," glancing at some blue looking envelopes lying near. "But you haven't opened one of them."

"Never do, nor answer them either.

"They keep up a pretty close correspondence considering it is one sided."

"Bertie," said Cecil, drawing on diligently, "can't something be done? You never seem to look into your affairs. Perhaps they wouldn't be so bad if you did. I shall be of age in August, and," colouring slightly, "I will lend you as much as you want. You can give me an I.O.U. for the amount," continued she, rather proud of her knowledge of business.

"You dear, romantic girl" (Cecil was chilled in a moment), "how could I take your money? I shouldn't have a chance of repaying it. No, I shall last as long as I can, and then try the Colonies. It is only my rascally self, after all, to think of. Thank goodness, I don't draw any delicate, fragile life after me into privation and discomfort.

Cecil bent more closely over her drawing.

“What are you doing?” said Bertie, impatiently. “I can’t see your face. Come and sit by me, Cecil. I like a ‘gentle hand in mine.’”

Cecil moved as if in a dream, and sat on a low chair near his couch.

“You have always been so kind and true to me,” said he, stroking her hair caressingly.

A slight movement of the handle of the door made them involuntarily separate, and Mrs. Rolleston entered.

“Cecil, your father is looking for you. He wants you to drive with him, and call on the Learmonths.”

“What an infernal bore!” said Du Meresq, energetically; “and I must lie in this confounded room, with nothing to do the whole afternoon. Can’t you get out of it, Cecil?”

“No, no!” said Mrs. Rolleston, hastily

meeting her daughter's eye. There was unspoken sympathy between them. Her half eager look of inquiry passed into intelligent acquiescence, and, with a regretful glance at Bertie, she left the room.

The next day and the one after the Colonel required his daughter's companionship; the third day, they all went out in the afternoon, as Du Meresq seemed better, and said he had letters to write. No sooner, however, was the house quiet and deserted, than he rang the bell, and sent for a sleigh, hobbling out with the assistance of a stick and the servant's arm. For the information of that lingering and curious functionary, he ordered the driver to go to the Club, which address, however, was altered after proceeding a short distance.



CHAPTER XII.

THE LAKE SHORE ROAD.

But all that I care for,
And all that I know,
Is that, without wherefore,
I worship thee so.

LORD LYTTON.

“I SUPPOSE, Bluebell, you keep all your fine spirits for company?” said Miss Opie, tauntingly; and, indeed, she had some reason to be aggrieved. Few things are more trying than living with a person in the persistent enjoyment of the blues; and the old, saddened by failing health and the memory of heavy sorrows, are apt to look upon gloom in youth as entrenching on their own prescriptive rights.

Bluebell was always now taking long, aimless walks, bringing home neither news nor gossip, and then sitting silent, absorbed in her own thoughts, or else feverishly expectant; while each evening she sank into deeper despondency after the day's disappointment.

"Spirits can't be made to order," answered she, shortly. "I have got nothing to talk about."

"I am afraid you are ill, my dear," said Mrs. Leigh; "outgrowing your strength, perhaps. You are such a great girl, Bluebell—so different to me; and you scarcely touched the baked mutton at dinner, which was a little frozen and red yesterday, but so nice to-day."

Bluebell shivered. She was not at a very critical age, but the culinary triumphs of the "general servant" made her practise a good deal of enforced abstinence since

she had been accustomed to properly prepared cookery at "The Maples."

"People who do nothing all day can't expect to be hungry," said Miss Opie, sententiously. "If a man will not work neither may he eat."

"Then it is all right," retorted Bluebell, "as it seems I do neither."

"Not work!" cried Mrs. Leigh. "Why, she has earned already more than I ever did in my life, and brought me ten dollars to get a dress with, only I shan't, for I shall keep it for her. I must say, Aunt Jane, you are always blaming the child; and, if her mother is satisfied, I think you may be."

Aunt Jane was silenced, but she wondered what Bluebell could do that her short-sighted mother would not be satisfied with. Mean time the object of the discussion had escaped from the room. She

had no wish to spend the afternoon in the dim parlour, stuffy with stove heat and the lingering aroma of baked mutton; and a fancy had occurred to her to wander through the wood she had last traversed with the sole occupant of her ill-regulated mind.

Trove, now a well-to-do and unabashed dog, rolled and kicked on his back in puppy-like ecstasy as he watched her dress, and officiously brought her her muff, which, however, he objected to resigning. Trove was Bluebell's confidant and the repository of her woes, and perhaps as safe a one as young ladies generally choose.

Not a sign of the Rollestons had she seen since her arrival at the cottage ten days ago. Bluebell thought she could not have been more cut off from them if she had crossed the Atlantic instead of the Common. Going to the Rink would have

too much the appearance of seeking Du Meresq, so she rigorously avoided that; but even in King Street, where Cecil's cutter flashed most days, she never caught sight of "Wings' " owl-decorated head.

There was a great deal of her father's disposition in Bluebell, and she chafed at the monotony of days so grey and eventless, and longed for she knew not what; so that it was life, movement, *pain* even, to exhaust those new springs of thought and feeling that the awakening touch of a first love had called forth, and would not now be laid.

Bluebell, like most Canadians, had had plenty of early admiration from hobbledoys, who made honest, though ungainly, love to her; but her heart would as soon have been touched by an amorous Orson as by these youthful tyros in the art. Du Meresq had that deceptive countenance apparently

created for the shipwreck of female hearts. Sometimes men called him an ugly fellow, but no woman ever thought so. There was expression enough in those luminous eyes to have set up three beauty men. They could look both demoniacal and seraphic,—tender often, but scarcely ever true; add to this a magnificent *physique*, a soft manner, a winning voice, and, what gave him an almost superstitious interest to women, that *fey* look attributed to the Stewarts. He had read and studied hard by fits and starts, for whatever possessed his mind he always pursued with ardour, and to Cecil was fond of inveighing against his useless, unsatisfying life. In spite of her infatuation, though, she judged him more truly than most people, and perceived that his fitful remorse was chiefly occasioned by pressure of money matters, and seldom lasted over pecuniary relief.

In the most secret flights of her imagination, she pictured herself in some new country with Bertie. An adventurous, reckless nature such as his, she thought, turned every gift to evil in the commonplace life where his idiosyncrasy had no play; but detached from his idle mess-room habits, and launched into a new career, when to live at all involved exertion of mind and body, would metamorphosize her hero into all she could wish.

Such was the ideal, in her conventual bringing up, of the rich and well placed Cecil; while Bluebell, to whom luxury was unknown, longed for wealth to take her into a sphere where taste was not starved by economy nor all her horizon bounded by weekly bills. But in both cases their air castles were to be occupied with Du Meresq.

The girl and the dog sped along on

their desolate walk—it was too cold to linger. Bluebell carefully followed the route she had taken with Bertie, that memory might be aided by association.

“Ah, Trove,” said she to the dog, who bounced up against her, “I am as much a waif and stray as you are—disowned by my grandfather, who might have made us rich, and taken up by people one day and forgotten the next; but you have drifted into harbour now, my dog, and who knows—”

A smothered growl interrupted this monologue, and then a sharp bark. Bluebell looked round to see what was exciting him; she heard a distant tinkle of bells, and listened keenly; laughing voices were apparently approaching. From an impulse that she could not have explained, Bluebell darted into an empty wood-shed, dragging Trove in after her,

and holding him firmly by the muzzle to stifle his growling. Through an aperture in the boards she could observe, unseen herself.

The sounds grew louder, and a score of sleighs defiled past her hiding-place. Bluebell scanned each carefully. There were the usual members of the Sleigh Club. She recognized the Tremaines, and several others of her little world. Jack in his tandem; but, faithful Lubin! no "cloud-capped" Muffin sat by his side; his companion was of the sterner sex, or, as he would have described him, "a dog." But where were the Rollestons? No representative of "The Maples" was present, not even Du Meresq. They had flashed past within a minute; but, like a fresh breeze over still water, the little incident had awakened and roused up Bluebell from her lethargy.

Her thoughts became more lively as she speculated why Bertie and Cecil were absent from the sleighing party. It was some consolation, at any rate, not to see him enjoying himself quite as much without her. The sun was setting redly as she neared the cottage, and a young moon gaining brightness. Bluebell, remembering a childish superstition, paused to wish. The passage was dark as she entered, and her mother's tones, talking with great volubility, struck her ear. "Mamma has her company voice on," thought she, which, being interpreted, meant an increase of nervousness and consequent garrulity.

She opened the door, and her heart gave a sudden leap as she became aware of, rather than saw in the dusk, the tall, broad-shouldered form of Du Meresq. Bluebell came stiffly forward, and offered

a cold hand, utterly belying her heart, to Bertie, who bent over it as if sorely tempted, in spite of Mrs. Leigh's presence, to carry it to his lips. But she withdrew it abruptly, and sat down, seized with more overpowering shyness than she had ever experienced.

Miss Opie's keen, attentive eyes were taking in the situation.

"Captain Du Meresq has been kind enough to call," said Mrs. Leigh, "to say there is no immediate hurry for your return, my dear."

Bluebell raised disappointed, questioning eyes; but something in his face conveyed to her that the message was coined as an excuse for his appearance.

"I hope Cecil is well?" said she, trying to speak unconcernedly; "but I saw she was not out with the Club to-day."

“I think she is tired of it. Where did you fall in with them?” asked he.

“In the Humber,” very consciously.

“Were you there?” asked Bertie, with a tender inflection in his voice, that Bluebell knew well. But she would not look up, and Miss Opie did, so he proceeded carelessly,—“I suppose they were coming from the Lake Shore Road, up the serpentine drive in the wood?”

“Oh! that is such a pretty walk in summer!” said Mrs. Leigh.

“I dare say,” said Bertie, looking straight down his nose. “I went round that way once, and even in winter found it the pleasantest walk I ever took in my life.”

“Ah, then,” said Mrs. Leigh, knowingly, “I dare say some pretty young lady was with you.”

“No such happiness,” said Bertie, with

an imperceptible glance at Bluebell. "The fact is, Mrs. Leigh, women detest me! I suppose it is my deep respect, making me so fearful of offending, that bores them; but I fear I am a social failure."

"In my day," said Miss Opie, ironically, "young ladies *expected* to be treated with respect."

"And that could not have been so long ago; yet now they are beyond a bashful man's comprehension," said Bertie, with an air of simplicity, slightly scanning Miss Opie's wakeful face. He had got on so well with the mamma, who was this old maid, who appeared so objectionably on the alert?

"Well, I am sure," said Mrs. Leigh, "some girls here *are* that pert and forward, I can't bear it myself; and yet the gentlemen all encourage it, and think it real smart. Lilla Tremaine, you know, Aunt Jane."

“Ah!” said Bertie, shaking his head,
“a very unsteady young person.”

While Du Meresq was making conversation, Bluebell sat incapable of contributing to it. She could not have believed that his presence should afford her so little pleasure; but he seemed incongruous here, and was apparently amusing himself with the simplicity of her relatives. A clatter of tea-things filled her mind with dismay. The ideas of the “help” on the subject of cleanliness were in a very rudimentary stage; and that the cloth would be in anything but its first freshness, was a moral certainty. Impossible, however, to avert the catastrophe, and the general servant, actuated by a determination to get another look at Miss Bluebell’s “young man,” undauntedly bore in the tray.

“Dear me, is it not rather early?” said

Mrs. Leigh. "Oh, Captain Du Meresq,"—seeing him rise,—“you must stay and have a cup with us.”

“Another day, if you will allow me,” said Bertie, trying to disguise his extreme lameness. “I hope, having found my way here, I may be permitted to call again in this sociable manner, and have a little agreeable conversation, so preferable to gaiety, which I abhor.”

“If you will take us as you find us,” said the little lady, graciously, “we shall look upon it as a great favour, I am sure. Dear me, Captain Du Meresq, have you hit your foot? You seem quite lame.”

“I am, rather. I had an accident. Is there not some shorter way back than the road I came?”

“Oh, yes, by Barker’s Row. You know the Link House?”

“No—a,” said Bertie, looking expres-

sively at Bluebell, as a hint that she might offer to point out the road.

"Oh, surely you *must*; keep straight on King, and then you come to—"

"Wolfe Street?" suggested Du Meresq.

"Gracious, no! that would be quite out of your way! Go to—I'll tell you what, Bluebell shall show you where you turn off—it isn't ten minutes from here."

Bertie murmured a profusion of thanks, and, distrustful of Miss Opie, protested against being so troublesome. But Bluebell, scarce able to believe in such luck, sprang up with a sudden illumination of countenance, and the next minute the lovers were alone under the light of the moon.

"Bluebell," said Du Meresq, "I have got a sleigh here. I thought I *might* get you out of it if I pretended I was walking, and didn't know the way; but the

fact is, my child, I can hardly limp a hundred yards. Come a little drive with me."

"Oh! I dare not. It is so late, and they expect me back again directly."

"Then you are going to run away the first moment we have been alone for so long!"

"Whose fault is that?" said she, reproachfully.

"Not mine. I have been laid up ten days with a broken ankle. But I suppose you have been seeing Jack Vavasour every day, and forgotten all about me?"

"Bertie," said Bluebell, hesitatingly, "did they say anything to you about—"

"About Jack? Yes, they said he was spoons on you. And also, Miss Bluebell, that you were awfully in love with him."

"No, no, nonsense," said she, blushing. "I meant about yourself."

"They know nothing of that?" said he, inquiringly.

"They do, though. I don't know what you will say, Bertie, but I told Mrs. Rolleston."

"What can you mean, Bluebell? Bella told me that you cared for nobody but Jack Vavasour; and I was deuced angry, I can tell you, at first, though I thought it uncommon 'cute of you saying so."

Bluebell, utterly confounded by this extraordinary assertion, had no time to reply, for she found herself close to a covered sleigh, and the man had got down and opened the door. She drew back.

"Jump in," said Bertie, impatiently.

Bluebell shook her head.

"What do you propose?" said he, in an angry whisper. "We can't sit out in the snow, and I can't walk another yard."

She hesitated, and he gently impelled her into the vehicle, following himself, to the anguish of his injured foot, that he had struck in his haste.

"Where to, sir?" said the man, whom Bertie, in his momentary pain, had forgotten.

"Go to the Don Bridge."

"Can't, sir. I am ordered at the College by six o'clock."

"Drive to the devil, then. I mean, drive about as long as you can. I like driving."

"Hush, Bertie! how can you? What will he think?"

"How much 'old rye' he will get out of the job. Come, Bluebell; the hour is ours, don't spoil it fidgetting about trivialities. I have scarcely dared look at you yet, my beautiful pet," trying to steal an arm round her waist. But she

drew herself away, irresponsive and rigid, being uneasy, and frightened at the escapade she had been led into.

“You haven’t a spark of moral courage, Bluebell,” said Bertie, impatiently. “You are as prim and unlike yourself as possible, just because you are wondering what that man on the box will think. Or, perhaps, you are afraid of that thin, sour old duenna at home.”

“She will be inquisitive enough,” said Bluebell, resignedly. “And, Bertie, I wanted to tell you, but, perhaps, you know, that they will never have me again at ‘The Maples’ while you are there,—Mrs. Rolleston so utterly disproves of it.”

“What is this hallucination that you have got hold of?” said Du Meresq. “What did you tell, or fancy you told, Bella?”

"We got on the subject. Your name wasn't actually mentioned; but she quite understood, and said something," said Bluebell, reddening, as she felt the awkwardness of her words, "very strong against it."

Bertie looked relieved. He began to understand the mistake, which he considered a fortunate one.

"And did you promise to give me up?"

She turned her large, innocent eyes upon him. "How could I, when I care for you more than anything in the world?"

"My poor little Bluebell!" said Du Meresq, crushing her in his arms. But the sleigh stopped; the man was getting down.

"My time is up, sir."

"Well, drive to where you took us up,"

said Bertie. "Bluebell, tell me quick, where shall I see you again?"

"I can't risk driving," said she, hurriedly. "When will you be able to walk?"

"Can't I see you alone at home sometimes? When are your people likely to be out?"

"They don't go out for days together, except on Sunday, to church; and Aunt Jane would suspect something directly if I didn't go with them."

"Let her, meddling old idiot! I shall come then, Bluebell."

"No, no, Bertie; pray don't! Could you walk in a week?"

"What an eternity! Well, meet me in the Avenue in the Queen's Park, at three o'clock on Wednesday. Here's this brute getting down again. Only just time to kiss those dear blue eyes. *Addio*, Leonore."

How the deuce am I to get home, I wonder?"

"Bertie, you'll never be able to walk."

"Never mind me. Run back, my dearest, and throw dust in the eyes of that misguided old female, who presumes to open them on what doesn't concern her."





CHAPTER XIII.

NORTHERN LIGHTS.

Do you remember
Those evenings in the bleak December,
Curtained warm from the snowy weather,
When you and I played chess together,
Checkmated by each other's eyes ?

THE WANDERER.

BLUEBELL sped home, and, to evade remarks, hung up her hat in the passage, as the least embarrassing way of reporting herself; then remained, perdu, in her own room, transfigured into fairy-land by her happy thoughts. Bertie was acquitted of intentional neglect. It was only the malignity of Fate that had divided them; and there was the positive anticipation of meeting again in six days. To be sure,

it involved entering on a course of deceit. Aunt Jane would, probably, be shocked, as she was at everything; mamma would not think much of it; and as for Mrs. Rolleston, she need not consider her wishes, after telling Bertie such a bare-faced fib about Jack Vavasour, evidently in the hope of making mischief between them. She was very much astonished at such unscrupulous conduct in her friend, but what other conclusion could she come to?

To be sure, common-sense whispered that looks and language such as Du Meresq had permitted himself, ought to be followed by an offer of marriage; but with common-sense Bluebell had little to do at this period, and first love cares not to concern itself with the prosaic. The mystery and romance of interviews with her love, "undreamt-of by the world in its primness," appeared far more enchant-

ing than any authorized attachment provided with a regulation gooseberry picker.

So she came down with a slightly defiant air; but meeting with nothing worse than a gravely knowing glance from Miss Opie, sat down to the piano to escape questioning.

Mrs. Leigh's thoughts were complacently occupied with the visitor. She only wanted further confirmation to place him in the light of a future son-in-law. Adversity had not given her the wisdom of the serpent, and she never dreamed of possible danger in the attentions of this unknown young man to her beautiful, but portionless, child.

However, her mind became unsettled again by the appearance of another suitor, in dog-skin gloves of a brilliant tan, and his usual air of cheerful confidence. No guile was there in Jack Vavasour, whose

prostrate adoration of her daughter was so undisguised, that she mentally deposed Bertie (whose devotion was more problematical) in his favour. Still she thought, "I should never think of influencing dear Bluebell one way or the other, and we shall see which proposes first."

Jack's visit, as usual, was a lengthy one. His fair enslaver had recovered her spirits, and no longer metaphorically turned her face to the wall. She was glad of distraction, and not ungratified by his allegiance, though without the slightest idea of returning it. Like the boys and the frogs, she did not consider that what was sport to the one was hard on the other, and probably would not have cared if it had struck her; for, whatever poets may say, there is no more thoroughly heartless age than sweet seventeen. When he sat on till the arrival of the unappetizing

meal they called a meat-tea, Bluebell did not wince at her mother inviting him to join it, simply because his opinion was a matter of indifference to her, though she carelessly recommended him not to be late for mess.

Jack, however, with magnanimous disregard of that usually important period of his day, stayed his healthy young appetite with the cold joint from dinner; and he and Bluebell amused themselves frying eggs and roasting chestnuts, which further assuaged its keen demands.

Many times during the evening did Mrs. Leigh leave the room, on the principle that young people like to be alone together. But all her tactics failed to uproot Miss Opie, who clung to her book and her seat by the fire, partly from the contrary conviction that young persons should *never* be alone together, and partly

because, save in the kitchen, there was no other fire in the house.

“What shall we do?” cried Bluebell, with the faintest of yawns, tired of consuming their culinary labours. “You don’t care for music, I know. There’s an old chess-board somewhere; and I can’t think of anything but cat’s-cradle, if you don’t like that.”

“I can play,” said Jack, stoutly, who had not attempted it since his childhood, but only wanted an excuse to remain on. So they sat down at the spidery table, saying little; Jack quite well entertained with his hand frequently coming in contact with Bluebell’s on the board. He would have liked to crush up that little member in his own, and meditated the bold *coup* more than once, but was always discouraged by that far away, unconscious look in her eyes.

In this squalid parlour, where she was the only soft-hued thing in the room, he thought her more beautiful than ever. Perhaps she was, for the love-light burned steadily in her Irish eyes, and he could not tell it was not for him.

Never were more lenient or careless adversaries. Twice Jack's queen was in Bluebell's grasp uncaptured, and he could at any time have checkmated her, had he been as attentive to the variations of the game as to those of her countenance. Suddenly Bluebell swept her hand over the board, crying,—“I never saw such men, they don't fight. We have been playing half-an-hour, and have hardly taken any prisoners.”

“It is a slow game,” said Jack, equably; “let us try cat's-cradle. Or, perhaps,” he continued, meeting with no response, “I ought to be saying good-night.”

Bluebell was secretly tired of him, and could not conceive on what principle her mother began pressing him to stay.

"There's the nicest bit of toasted cheese coming up for supper," said she. "I know all officers like a Welsh rabbit. My poor late husband did, though he used to say, in his funny way, he only ate it because there was nothing else fit to touch."

"I fear I must go; but I hope you'll ask me to tea again, Mrs. Leigh, it is so jolly getting away from mess sometimes," said the young diplomatist.

"That I will," said she, highly flattered, "and I shall be very much offended if you don't come. I am only sorry you can't sit a little longer now."

Jack was not quite sure he couldn't, but Bluebell, pretending not to see his hesitation, held out her hand and said

“good-night,” so he had nothing for it but to go. In two minutes, though, his head re-appeared. “Come and look at the Northern Lights, Miss Leigh; regular tip-top fireworks. Here’s a shawl; make haste.” But when she came out, only a few weak-coloured pink clouds were floating about.

“Is that all?” ejaculated Bluebell.

“Not quite,” said Jack; “it was a western light I was trying to invoke, or, rather, the light of my eyes. When may I come and see you again, Bluebell?”

“I came out to look at meteors,” said she, laughing at his unwonted flowers of speech; “and I don’t know who gave you leave to call me by my Christian name.”

“It isn’t your Christian name,” urged Jack.

“It will be my *nom de guerre*, then, if you say it again.”

“Change it if you like,” quoth he, “if you will let me change your surname too.”

A startled stare of blue eyes, a smothered laugh, and Bluebell had darted into the house, clapping the door after her.

“Confound it,” thought Jack, “just my luck. In another moment I should have kissed her—I *think* I should; but, hang it, when a girl looks you straight in the face and talks to you as if you were her grandmother, it puts one off. Well, I have kissed lots of girls without proposing, and now it’s *vice versa*, for it was as good as an offer, and all I got by it was her nipping in just when I thought I had her to myself.”





CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRYST.

'Twas full of love—to rhyme with dove,
And all that tender sort of thing ;
Of sweet and meet—and heart and dart ;
But not a word about a ring !

Hood.

TIME flew much lighter with our heroine as she counted the days to the next rendezvous with Du Meresq: anticipation is ever sweeter than reality. The cottage was no longer dull, nor existence empty; even the unrenewed and diminishing snow, dusky as a goose in a manufacturing town, was the symptom of approaching spring and verdure. Who need think of the torrents of rain which must precede it?

The little episode with Jack outside the door afforded her secret entertainment, and although she did not look upon it as a *bond-fide* proposal, that did not bias her intention of relating the anecdote for Bertie's delectation. It might be just as well to let him see, if he couldn't speak out, others could; and if he were jealous, why so much the better.

Clouds were chasing each other in the sky, and the increased mildness of the atmosphere inspired Bluebell with the dread that rain was approaching; for a rendezvous under dripping umbrellas, if feasible, was not the most desirable *pose* for a romantic interview.

However, the morning rose clear and sunny, the snow was thawing, and in many places the runners of the sleighs grated on bare ground.

Bluebell was exultant. The elements

evidently didn't mean to oppose her, but she was somewhat disconcerted at dinner by Miss Opie's remarks on her Sunday dress, which, being of a becoming hue, she had rashly donned.

"Are you going visiting, Bluebell, that you are so smart?"

"Oh, dear no; only for a walk."

"How foolish to draggle that mazarin blue poplinette in sloppy snow! Once let it get any snow stains on, and it will look quite shabby on bright spring days."

"It's no use having things, if one doesn't wear them," returned the girl, evasively. But when she came down ten minutes later equipped for her walk, she encountered Miss Opie again in full marching order.

"My dear, as you are dressed so nicely, I dare say you are going 'on King,' and so am I; so we can walk together."

Consternation in Bluebell's face—it was only a quarter to three.

“I am going quite in the opposite direction,” cried she, hurriedly, and, without waiting to see the effect of her words, abruptly fled.

“Just Canadian independence,” muttered Miss Opie; “it makes all the girls such thoroughly bad style.”

Bluebell began to feel very nervous; two or three young friends that she met on the way, she passed with a quick nod and averted face, dreading their joining her. Her eye swept the broad walk of the Avenue in an instant; no familiar figure arrested her vision, and the seats placed at regular intervals on each side were also vacant of interest.

So she was first—the Cathedral clock had struck three some minutes before; she was perplexed to know what to do with

herself, and began walking slowly to the other end. Of all possible *contretemps*, the non-appearance of Du Meresq had never suggested itself; but after a couple of turns, the unwelcome misgiving strengthened, that there would be only one at the tryst that day.

In a tumult of disappointment and indignation, conjecture after conjecture chased each other; while ever and anon her fancy was mocked by some one turning in at the gates bearing a general resemblance to Du Meresq, only to be dispelled by a nearer and more accurate view.

A simple explanation suddenly dawned; Bertie might have written to warn her of an unavoidable absence. The possibility of such a letter, which, had she received it in the morning, would have been the bitterest disappointment, now seemed a

resurrection from despair to hope, and, with relaxed features and brightening eyes, Bluebell walked rapidly through the gates to the Post-office.

Letters were so rare and unlooked for at the cottage, that the postman never included it in his rounds; and the contents of the pigeon-hole appropriated to them at the office was seldom inquired for except on mail-days, when there might be an off-chance of an English letter for Miss Opie. Even Bluebell, who for the first fortnight after her banishment from "The Maples" had been a regular applicant, had not been near it since Bertie's visit to the cottage.

"Two letters for Miss Theodora Leigh." One she scarcely looked at; the other instinct told her must be Bertie's handwriting; it had been lying two days at the Post-office.

"My dearest Bluebell," ran this note, "I can't come to the Avenue on Wednesday, being now entirely confined to the sofa with my ankle, which has gone to the bad. I am only staying on now with sick leave, and the Chief very sulky at that. When shall I again see those beloved, angel-like, soft blue eyes? Don't write to me here, for, as you may remember, the orderly fetches the letters, and my august brother-in-law sometimes deals them round.

"Your ever devotedly attached,

"A. DU M."

Poor Bluebell, as she read these few and rather cavalier lines, felt for the moment as if she had never suffered till now; his hinted-at departure, and apparent resignation to absence from her, was a severe shock, and, in the first hot feeling of grief, the scales fell from her eyes, and she began

to see Bertie as he was. But she could not yet endure the light of reason, so resumed her voluntary blindness, and re-read the letter, and though very little of it could satisfy her expectations, she dwelt more on the few words that did. After awhile, she remembered the other letter, and found, with awakening interest, it was from Mrs. Rolleston. This was written in a pleasant chit-chat style, giving an account of their every-day life since she left, and not at all avoiding Bertie's name, the tedious effect of his to-boggining accident being one of the chief incidents mentioned. It wound up with saying, that they expected her back as soon as she liked.

Bluebell felt rather mystified at the tone of this epistle; but was much comforted by the thought that the ban was removed, and she might go to "The Maples" and judge for herself. This was dated prior to the

other letter, but Bertie appeared to have been ignorant of it.

The following day, our heroine, in a hired sleigh, was jingling back to "The Maples," and curiosity and interest all centred on one question—"Is he there still?"

As she passed through the hall, her eye glanced searchingly round on the chance of seeing some familiar property of Bertie's. There was only a pair of his moccasins; but they might so easily have been left behind as useless now the snow was evaporating.

Mrs. Rolleston and Cecil received her very cordially, but, knowing their sentiments, that was rather an unfavourable omen, and Freddy and Lola, who had come down to see her, kept up such an incessant chatter, that there seemed no chance of obtaining the information she dreaded.

At last, in a momentary pause, she faltered out a leading remark in such a low voice that no one attended to it. A minute later, she tried again,—“I hope Captain Du Meresq is better.”

“How red you have got, ‘Boobell!’” said Freddy. “Look, mamma!”

“What did you say, my dear—Bertie? Oh, yes, he is very lame still; but he was obliged to go yesterday.”

The sudden colour left Bluebell’s cheek, and she sat for some minutes in a relaxed, drooping attitude, oblivious of all around, till becoming sensible of Cecil’s gaze rivetted on her. It was a cold, satirical expression, at the same time inquiring. Bluebell was very unhappy; but this roused her, and, raising her head, she looked her enemy steadily in the eyes, with a bitter smile.

She never, strange to say, suspected

Cecil of being a rival, merely supposing she was carrying on the family politics; and wounded by her officiously hostile demeanour, as she considered it, resolved no trace of her sufferings should ever be witnessed by this cold friend.

And thus it happened that the topic was jealously avoided by each; though, with mutual occupation and amusements, they became friendly again now the disturber of their amicability was removed.

Bertie and Cecil had been inseparable the last week. His premature exertion in calling at the cottage had thrown him back; and really ill, and in enforced inaction, he could not bear her out of his sight.

So day after day Cecil passed in the smoking-room, only hurrying out for a short drive or constitutional; and half-repaid by the gloomy complaint, "How

long you have been!" when she re-entered.

Du Meresq's correspondence, too, as we have before hinted, was not calming. A half-indignant letter from a friend whose temporary accommodation had not been repaid, a bill at three months wanting renewing, a tailor threatening the extremest rigours of the law, and similar literature, familiar to a distressed man, was punctually brought by the Post-office orderly for his delectation.

"You seem interested, Cecil," said he, as, with the unceremoniousness of a trusted *confidante*, she glanced through the variations of the same text. "Do you young ladies ever get up behind each other, and back each other's bills?"

"You haven't opened some, Bertie; and they are not all bills."

"You can, if it amuses you," hobbling

across the room. "Why, Cecil, my foot is almost sound again. We'll drive somewhere this afternoon, anyhow."

"See what the doctor says. Look here, Bertie, here's a letter marked private, so I didn't go on."

"Where did you find that? I never saw it." As he read, his brow grew dark, and he pondered several minutes; while Cecil, devoured with curiosity, and half-apprehensive of evil, remained silent.

"Will you get me a railway-guide, Cecil? There's one in the dining-room."

She complied, most unwillingly.

"Are you really going, Bertie?"

"I must, to-night."

"Why?" she more looked than asked.

He glanced through the letter again, and tossed it to her. "You see I have no secrets from you, Cecil, though I should

not care for any one else in the house to be acquainted with its contents."

It was a confidential letter from his Colonel, saying, if absolutely necessary, he would give him more sick leave; but advising him, if possible, to return at once and settle some of his more urgent liabilities, which, having repeatedly come to his ears, he could no longer avoid taking notice of, unless he took steps to get the more serious ones shortly arranged.

"What *will* you do, Bertie?"

"I don't know that anything but jumping into the Lachine Rapids would solve the difficulty," returned he, lightly; "and even that must be deferred till the river is open."

"How much is it?" impatiently.

"I dare say six hundred might soothe the chief's sense of propriety, and give

one a little breathing-time. But I can't get that, so the smash must come a little sooner than it otherwise would."

"You tell me that, and tie my hands by refusing to let me help you. Bertie, if you could just hold on till August, when I might draw any cheques I pleased—"

"You dearest little angel!" interrupted Du Meresq, warmly; "what have I done that you should be so kind to me? But all women are alike,—generous and true-hearted when a fellow is down in the world; and—"

"Then you promise? You will count on the money?" said Cecil, not much flattered at being supposed only to act up to the inevitable instincts of her sex.

"Good heavens, Cecil! no; I am not such an unprincipled brute as to rob you of a penny. Under no possible circumstances could I touch—"

“Under *no possible* circumstances?” leapt out before she could restrain her speech. Had the meaning escaped him, the eloquent blood which rushed over neck and brow must have betrayed it completely.

Bertie, who had been speaking without motive, was taken by surprise as the sense of her impulsive words flashed on his brain.

“My darling Cecil!”

Cecil, the colour of a carnation, and expiring with embarrassment, raised her eyes, and encountered his fixed on her with a fond, sad, but *not* responsive expression. If shame could kill, she had received her *coup de grâce* that moment. He had understood, and yet said nothing.

The most rapturous gratitude on his part would hardly have reconciled her to herself; not to be met half-way was ignominious rejection.

It had all been the work of one moment, and relief came in the next with the entrance of Colonel Rolleston. Cecil, feeling as if delivered from a spell, got out of the room, and entrenched herself in her own, where her thoughts became almost unendurable.

In horror at what she had done, her first wish was never to see Bertie again. Every particle of pleasure in his society must now be over since that one mad, unguarded sentence.

"I might have known," thought she, bitterly, "that that false, caressing manner of his never meant anything. I have seen it with a dozen girls—even Bluebell,"—here she winced; "and yet in the face of all probability I must needs believe myself more to him than any one, because it suits him to make me the receptacle of his worries. Well, he is disinterested, at any

rate, since all my money has no more attractions for him than myself."

A stormy hour did poor Cecil pass with her wounded pride, when she was interrupted by Lola, the Mercury of the establishment, who came to tell her that "dinner would be an hour earlier, because Bertie was going away."

Cecil received the intelligence very shortly, and nipped in the bud her evident intention of lingering by declaring herself "busy," which that astute young person, seeing no signs of employment, interpreted as "cross."

"I must face it," thought she, as the last peal of the gong jarred on her nerves. She descended just in time to see Colonel and Mrs. Rolleston disappear into the dining-room. Du Meresq, who had waited, eagerly placed her hand under his arm, and drew her back a moment.

"Cecil, where have you been hiding all this afternoon?"

I suppose he had the key to the answer, for the changing hues of her complexion, in which pride struggled with confusion, was the only one he got.

"You utter little goose!" said Bertie, emphatically, crushing the hand under his arm as they entered the dining-room. Curious to relate, Cecil scarcely felt so ashamed as she had an hour ago. Not a chance would she give him, though, of speaking a syllable in private; and very soon after dinner he departed, taking leave of Cecil before all the rest, with no more distinguishing mark of affection than a long hand-clasp, which seemed as if it would never unlock.

"Only his odious flirting manner!" said Cecil to herself; but she did not think so,

and felt a good deal less self-contempt than she had before.

Next day, when Mrs. Rolleston announced Bluebell's expected return, Cecil felt quite in charity with her, and resolved to make things pleasanter than they had been, though this relenting mood was nearly dissipated by her unconscious rival presuming to look miserable at the tidings of Du Meresq's departure.

END OF VOL. I.

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Generally speaking, in criticising a novel we confine our observations to the merits of the author. In this case we must make an exception, and say something as to the publisher. *The Mistress of Langdale Hall* does not come before us in the stereotyped three-volume shape, with rambling type, ample margins, and nominally a guinea and a half to pay. On the contrary, this new aspirant to public admiration appears in the modest guise of a single graceful volume, and we confess that we are disposed to give a kindly welcome to the author, because we may flatter ourselves that she is in some measure a *protégée* of our own. A few weeks ago an article appeared in our columns censuring the prevailing fashion of publishing novels at nominal and fancy prices. Necessarily, we dealt a good deal in commonplaces, the absurdity of the fashion being so obvious. We explained, what is well known to every one interested in the matter, that the regulation price is purely illusory. The publisher in reality has to drive his own bargain with the libraries, who naturally beat him down. The author suffers, the trade suffers, and the libraries do not gain. Arguing that a palpable absurdity must be exploded some day unless all the world is qualified for Bedlam, we felt ourselves on tolerably safe ground when we ventured to predict an approaching revolution. Judging from the preface to this book, we may conjecture that it was partly on our hint that Mr. Tinsley has published. As all prophets must welcome events that tend to the speedy accomplishment of their predictions, we confess ourselves gratified by the promptitude with which Mr. Tinsley has acted, and we heartily wish his venture success. He recognises that a reformation so radical must be a work of time, and at first may possibly seem to defeat its object. For it is plain that the public must first be converted to a proper regard for its own interest; and, by changing the borrowing for the buying system, must come in to buy the publisher out. He must look, moreover, to the support and imitation of his brethren of the trade. We doubt not he has made the venture after all due deliberation, and that we may rely on his determination seconding his enterprise. All prospectuses of new undertakings tend naturally to exaggeration, but success will be well worth the waiting for, should it be only the shadow of that on which Mr. Tinsley reckons. He gives some surprising figures; he states some startling facts; and, as a practical man, he draws some practical conclusions. He quotes a statement of Mr. Charles Reade's, to the effect that three publishers in the United States had disposed of no less than 370,000 copies of Mr. Reade's

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latest novel. He estimates that the profits on that sale—the book being published at a dollar—must amount to £25,000. Mr. Reade, of course, has a name, and we can conceive that his faults and blemishes may positively recommend themselves to American taste. But Mr. Tinsley remarks that if a publisher could sell 70,000 copies in any case, there would still be £5,000 of clear gain; and even if the new system had a much more moderate success than that, all parties would still profit amazingly. For Mr. Tinsley calculates the profits of a sale of 2,000 copies of a three volume edition at £1,000; and we should fancy the experience of most authors would lead them to believe he overstates it. It will be seen that at all events the new speculation promises brilliantly, and reason and common-sense conspire to tell us that the reward must come to him who has patience to wait. *Palman qui meruit ferat*, and may he have his share of the profits too. Meanwhile, here we have the first volume of Mr. Tinsley's new series in most legible type, in portable form, and with a sufficiently attractive exterior. The price is four shillings, and, the customary trade deduction being made to circulating libraries, it leaves them without excuse should they deny it to the order of their customers.

The story is interesting and very pleasantly written, and for the sake of both author and publisher we cordially wish it the reception it deserves.

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